1608/4949

A LETTER FROM A BLACKSMITH, TO THE MINISTERS and ELDERS OF THE CHURCH of SCOTLAND.

In which the Manner of PUBLIC WORSHIP in that CHURCH is considered; its Inconveniencies and Defects pointed out; and Methods for removing them humbly proposed.

Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in Heaven, and thou upon Earth: therefore let thy words be few.

Eccles. v. 2.

I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also.

1 Cor. xiv. 15.

THE FOURTH EDITION.

DUBLIN:

Printed by GEORGE FAULKNER in *Essex-Street*,

M, DCC. LIX.

562
1608/4949.

ADVERTISEMENT

FROM THE

LONDON EDITOR.

IF, in the following ſheets, the reader finds the Blackſmith now and then introducing ſcraps of Latin, he will be the leſs ſurprized if he reflects, that in Scotland moſt of the mechanics have a ſmattering of that language, which is taught even in the country pariſh ſchools. It ſeems the author thought it incumbent upon him, when he had to do with the clergy, to muſter up all the little learning he was maſter of. With what propriety and judgment his quotations are introduced, is ſubmitted to the reader, by his moſt obedient ſervant,

The PUBLISHER.

A

LETTER

TO THE

MINISTERS and ELDERS

OF THE

CHURCH of SCOTLAND.

Right Reverend and Right Honourable,

I Have preſumed to addreſs you upon a ſubject, which appears to me of the greateſt importance, and worthy of the conſideration of the miniſters and elders of the church of Scotland; thank God, I have reaſon to hope, from your wiſdom, learning, and piety, that I ſhall be favoured with a fair and patient hearing, tho' my ſphere in life be low, and my ſentiments ſet off with no other advantages than ſincerity and truth, as far as I can diſtinguiſh it; for God, and my own heart, bear witneſs, that I preſent this addreſs with no other view than to promote (as much as I can) the glory of God, the intereſts of true religion, and the honour, purity, and peace of the church of Scotland. Could I have found any better method of communicating my

thoughts than by a letter, I would willingly have choſen it; or had I hoped ever to have ſeen a more favourable ſeaſon than the preſent, I would patiently have waited for it. But now we are bleſſed with a learned body of clergy, with a prince well diſpoſed to promote true piety among his people, and we have the happineſs to live in an age, in which the prejudices of parties are moſtly worn off, the rage of diſpute abated, and men diſpoſed to hear truth, and obey reaſon; ſuch peaceful happy days are deſigned by heaven, and ought to be employed by men, to repair in religion, what has been pulled down by mad paſſions, in turbulent times; to reſtore to its firſt beauty, whatever has been defaced by party prejudices in the days of contention, and to recover the purity of our faith, and decency of our worſhip, from the ruſt and low ſuperſtition which they have contracted in the ignorant ages; and tinctures of enthuſiaſm they imbibed in the ſhock and tumult of the reformation. There was no church that met with greater oppoſition, or was more violently agitated than ours; and tho' (thank God) it ſtood out the ſtorm, yet it ſuffered very ſeverely; and when the fury was in ſome degree abated, and men had time to look about them, our church appeared little better than a ruin; her ſacred buildings levelled with the ground, or bare ſhattered walls, the ſtanding monuments of religious madneſs; her treaſures robbed by ſacrilegious hands; her regiſters deſtroyed, or carried off; her funds applied to profane uſes; and her clergy left to ſtarve: would to God ſhe had ſuffered only in theſe leſs eſſential things.

But along with theſe ſhe contracted a ſingular and whimſical taſte, her principles of faith grew dark and myſterious, and her method of worſhip defective and unreaſonable; ſome of theſe ruins

ſhe never can repair; ſome of them indeed time has in a great meaſure patched up; and ſome of them remain to be repaired by the preſent rulers of our church, or by ſucceeding generations: of this kind is our publick worſhip; in which there are ſeveral things that demand your ſerious attention, and call loudly for the diligence and learning of the preſent age. I will preſume, with due deference, to point out a few of them; hoping that my poor endeavours may at leaſt obtain pardon, out of reſpect to the importance of the ſubject, and the ſincerity of my intention; and that ſome able head and good heart, will take the hint, and fully point out the flaws, in our preſent way of worſhip, and direct us how to amend them. Some unprejudiced, and happy genius, may perhaps appear, whoſe perſuaſive eloquence, refined expreſſion, and concluſive arguments may command attention, and gain aſſent; in ſpite of the bigotry of the ignorant, the vain ambition of thoſe, that are fond of popularity, and the whimſical opinions of enthuſiaſts. 'Till ſuch an one ſhall appear, I hope you will not take it amiſs, that I offer my remarks, eſpecially as I beg leave to aſſure you, that this my addreſs does not proceed from a fondneſs of novelty, much leſs any intention to diſturb the peace of the church eſtabliſhed by law, or indeed from any other or any worſe motive, than that her publick ſervice may be ſuch as ſeems beſt calculated for promoting the intereſts of religion and virtue; and moſt ſuitable for reaſonable creatures to offer, and an infinitely wiſe God to accept.

FIRST, I ſubmit to your ſerious conſideration, whether a larger portion of the ſcriptures ſhould not be read every Lord's day in our publick aſſemblies; the reading of the ſcriptures always made a part of the publick ſervice in all the churches

churches of God; the law and the prophets, were ſolemnly read * in the ſynagogues every ſabbath day; our Saviour countenanced and ſanctified this practice † with his preſence and example; the apoſtle Paul peremptorily commands Timothy to give attendance to reading, as well as to exhortation and doctrine; and the primitive church religiouſly obſerved this command, as Juſtin Martyr ‖ bears witneſs. "Upon the day that is called Sunday (ſays he) all that live in the country, or in the towns, aſſemble in one place, and the commentaries of the apoſtles, or the writings of the prophets are read, 'till the time allotted for them be expired." Nay more, our own directory for Public worſhip, (which perhaps may have more weight with ſome, than the example of our Saviour, the command of his apoſtles, or the practice of the pureſt antiquity) recommends that ordinarily one chapter out of each Teſtament ſhould be read at every meeting. I am at a loſs whether to aſcribe the negligence of this eſſential part of our ſervice to the pride of the clergy, or the perverſeneſs of the people, perhaps it may be in ſome degree owing to both; the clergy, probably, think that it would not give them a ſufficient opportunity to diſplay their own talents; and the people, that it does not ſo fully pleaſe their ears, always itching with the deſire of ſomething new: to the firſt I ſhall only obſerve, that tho' we have, as we always ought to have, a very great reſpect for the obſervations and diſcourſes of our ſpiritual guides, yet at the ſame time we cannot but wiſh to hear what the *Spirit ſaith unto the churches*, in his own words; we have room to wiſh for this, as we are told

* Acts xv. 28. † Luke iv. 17. ‖ Apol. ii. p. 28. Tertul. ad gent. pag. 47. § 498.

told by the apoſtle, that the ſcriptures *are profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for inſtruction in righteouſneſs*; and that by them *the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furniſhed unto all good works*. It is true you indulge us now and then with ten or a dozen of verſes of pure ſcripture in our publick aſſemblies, but as we * have no regular plan of reading the ſcriptures, of conſequence we only hear detached places, choſen at the pleaſure of the preacher, and applied to what purpoſes he thinks fit; this leaves our underſtandings too much in the power of the clergy, and expoſes the ſimple and ignorant (who make the greateſt part of our congregations) to be ſeduced by the party principles and whimſical opinions of the preacher. It may at firſt ſight appear, that the whole plan of our worſhip is as happily calculated for making a property of the laity, and keeping their judgements and conſciences in the power of the parſon, as any part of the popiſh ſyſtem; for the miniſter needs not read any part of the ſcriptures unleſs he pleaſes; he may chuſe what place he thinks proper, may begin where he inclines, and break off when he has a mind; he may mangle them in any manner he thinks fit, and make them ſay whatever he would have them to ſay.

But allow me to tell you, that as the reading of the ſcriptures in public aſſemblies is of divine appointment, no power upon earth can diſpenſe with the obligation; as they contain the articles of our faith, and the rules by which we are to regulate our lives, nothing can ſupply, and therefore nothing ought to uſurp their place; and as all the

* Our directory declares that it is requiſite that all the cannonical books be read over in order; but our parſons proceed in a different method.

the reformed churches are agreed, that the ſcriptures are plain in things neceſſary to ſalvation, we ought to hear them as they are, without your gloſſes and comments; nay, what can be more effectual for our ſalvation, or ſo proper for Inſtruction, ſeeing they bear witneſs for themſelves, that the *word of God is ſharper than a two-edged ſword, piercing even to the dividing aſunder of the ſoul and ſpirit, and is a diſcerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart* *. *That it converts the ſoul, and makes the ſimple wiſe* †. Is there any thing that can be ſubſtituted in the place of the ſcriptures, from which, ſuch great and happy effects may be expected? But if this ſhameful negligence be owing to the perverſe humour of the people, who perhaps may think that the reading of the ſcriptures is a dry inſipid part of the ſervice, you will not, I hope, take it ill if I ſay, that amuſements are more their errand to church than inſtruction, that they are more deſirous of new words than ſound doctrine, and that in fact their hearts are carnal, and eſtranged from the things of the Spirit; for the apoſtle informs us, that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit, for they are fooliſhneſs to him. Pardon me if I think that your compliance with this humour is like Aaron's to the folly of the Iſraelites; as he ſet up a calf made with his own hands, to be the object of the people's worſhip, inſtead of the living God; ſo you ſet up your own compoſitions, to direct the faith and regulate the manners of the people, in the place of the ſcriptures of truth, dictated by the Holy Spirit. The ſervice of God in the way of his own appointment ever was, and ever will be diſliked by the bulk of the people; the Jews would willingly have embraced any religion, but that which

* Heb. iv. 12. † Pſal. xix. 7.

which was given them from heaven; they would have ſacrificed in any place but in that pointed out by their Maker; and thought no rites burdenſome but thoſe that God was pleaſed to appoint; but with reſpect to thoſe the prophet upbraids them with ſaying, as our people ſay, *Behold, what a wearineſs is it* *. It is the buſineſs and duty of miniſters to check and reſiſt this humour of the people, and not encourage it by a mean compliance with a vitiated taſte, and a baſe betraying of the truſt repoſed in them; but, alas! the taſte of the people in this coincides with the inclinations of the paſtor, and flatters his pride and vanity too much to be reſtrained; however, with all humility I preſume to beg, that you would be pleaſed to conſider, how you can anſwer to God, to your own conſciences, and to us your hearers, for ſuch a dangerous and wilful neglect.

As to praiſe, we ſeem to ſtudy to give this part of our worſhip as much the air of ruſticity, and contempt of God as poſſible; becauſe we thought that the engagement of the heart was (as indeed it is) the eſſence of this part of worſhip, we have whimſically thrown out every thing that helped to engage and elevate the heart; many of the words we uſe are obſolete and low, the verſification is mean and barbarous, and the muſick harſh and ill performed; our harmony, otherways not very ſweet, is entirely loſt, and the ſenſe broke off at every line; our poſture too is the moſt indecent, negligent, and improper for ſinging well, that we could have contrived; it is true the poſture is of no importance, farther than as it expreſſeth our reverence to the God whom we worſhip; yet it is as neceſſary that it ſhould be decent, as that our words ſhould be proper, for both are only ſigns of

* Malachi i. 13.

of inward ſenſations; ſhould we find a fellow crying very bitterly, and dancing very briſkly, theſe are ſigns of ſo oppoſite ſenſations, that we would be apt to imagine that he was diſtracted; and what ſhall we conclude, when we hear a congregation addreſſing God in ſome ardent hymn, or earneſt petition, and ſee them ſitting upon their breech, or lolling with the moſt negligent air and poſture upon their ſeats? the ſigns here point to very different ſenſations! Quintillian ſeems to think that there may be a ſoleciſm in geſture as well as in the expreſſion; and if ſuch a thing can be, we ſeem guilty of a very great one, in uſing the moſt indifferent, negligent poſture, when we are employed in the moſt intereſting and ſerious affair, I mean offering praiſe to the living God.

I cannot help thinking, that all the rational people of our communion muſt be ſhocked with the indecencies, and follies, that attend the adminiſtration of our Lord's ſupper, known among the common people by the name of an *occaſion*. We accuſe the Roman church of ſuperſtition, and that very juſtly; but in this inſtance ſhe may fairly retort and tell us, that we blame in others, what we approve of, or at leaſt allow in ourſelves; for if our people did not imagine that there was ſome ſuperior virtue, in ſermons preached upon theſe *occaſions*, ſome ſanctity in the place, or ſome merit in their attendance, it is unlikely that ſuch Numbers, who have no intention to communi cate, ſhould crowd from all quarters, leave their pariſh churches almoſt empty, and ſlight as good ſermons, which they might hear without the fatigue of travelling, or the inconveniencies that attend a crowd. Superſtition in all countries has the ſame effect, tho' it may be directed to different objects: in popiſh countries, people crowd from place to place to viſit the

ſhrines

ſhrines of the ſaints, and pray before the moſt famous images; in Scotland, they run from kirk to kirk as it were after the hoſt, and flock to ſee a ſacrament, as thoſe to ſhare in a proceſſion; and too many of our people (with ſhame we muſt confeſs) make the ſame uſe of our *occaſions*, that the papiſts do of their pilgrimages and proceſſions; that is, to indulge themſelves in drunkenneſs, luſt, and idleneſs; moſt of the ſervants when they agree to ſerve their maſters in the weſtern parts of the kingdom, make a ſpecial proviſion, that they ſhall have liberty to go to a certain number of fairs, or to an equal number of *ſacraments*; and as they conſider a *ſacrament* or an *occaſion* (as they call the adminiſtration of the Lord's ſupper in a neighbouring pariſh) in the ſame light in which they do a fair, ſo they behave at it much in the ſame manner. I defy Italy, in ſpite of all its ſuperſtition, to produce a ſcene better fitted to raiſe pity and regret in a religious, humane, and underſtanding heart, or to afford an ampler field for ridicule, to the careleſs and profane, than what they call a field preaching upon one of thoſe *occaſions*: at the time of the adminiſtration of our Lord s ſupper (ye know) that upon the Thurſday, Saturday, and Monday, we have preaching in the fields near the church, which it ſeems we muſt not uſe upon that *occaſion*; I have often thought that the frequency of the ſight makes it familiar, and conſequently leſs ſhocking to you, or that being in the inner circle, you ſeldom have acceſs to ſee the indecency and abſurdity of the whole ſcene, otherways you would not encourage it. Allow me then to deſcribe it, as it really is: at firſt you find a great number of men and women lying together upon the graſs; here they are ſleeping and ſnoring, ſome with their faces towards heaven, others with their faces turned down-

downwards, or covered with their bonnets; there you find a knot of young fellows and girls making aſſignations to go home together in the evening, or to meet in ſome ale-houſe; in another place you ſee a pious circle ſitting round an ale barrel, many of which ſtand ready upon carts, for the refreſhment of the ſaints. The heat of the ſummer ſeaſon, the fatigue of travelling, and the greatneſs of the crowd naturally diſpoſe them to drink; which inclines ſome of them to ſleep, works up the enthuſiaſm of others, and contributes not a little to produce thoſe miraculous converſions that ſometimes happen at theſe *occaſions*; in a word, in this *ſacred* aſſembly there is an odd mixture of religion, ſleep, drinking, courtſhip, and a confuſion of ſexes, ages, and characters. When you get a little nearer the ſpeaker, ſo as to be within the reach of the ſound, tho' not of the ſenſe of the words, for that can only reach a ſmall circle, even when the preacher is favoured with a calm; and when there happens to be any wind ſtirring, hardly can one ſentence be heard diſtinctly at any conſiderable diſtance; in this ſecond circle you will find ſome weeping, and others laughing, ſome preſſing to get nearer the tent or tub in which the parſon is ſweating, bawling, jumping, and beating the deſk; others fainting with the ſtifling heat, or wreſtling to extricate themſelves from the crowd; one ſeems very devout and ſerious, and the next moment is ſcolding and curſing his neighbour, for ſqueezing or treading on him; in an inſtant after, his countenance is compoſed to the religious gloom, and he is groaning, ſighing, and weeping for his ſins; in a word, there is ſuch an abſurd mixture of the ſerious and comick, that were we conveened for any other purpoſe, than that of worſhipping the God and

govern-

governor of nature, the ſcene would exceed *all power of face.*

But when one conſiders, what ſolemn awe ſhould accompany the pronounciation of his name, and what decent gravity attend his worſhip, and ſees ſuch an unhappy contraſt, if his heart be not entirely unacquainted with the feelings of humanity, the ſigh will force its way, and the pitying tear ſtart into his eye; eſpecially if he knows, that many of the clergy encourage this abſurdity; that this is the time, when they vie with one another for popularity, and try who can conveen the greateſt mob; that ſome of the elders are ſo fond of theſe religious farces, that they have threatened to abandon their churches, if the abſurd practice of preaching without doors ſhould be diſcontinued; and that even thoſe of the clergy, who have ſenſe to perceive its inconveniencies, and ingenuity to own that it is wrong, yet want courage to oppoſe the popular phrenſy, and reſolution to reform what in their own hearts they cannot but condemn. Whether we conſider this practice in a moral, political, or religious light, we ſhall find it attended with very bad conſequences; how much muſt it encourage drunkenneſs when ſuch crowds are conveened, from all quarters; what muſt the conſequence be, when a whole country ſide is thrown looſe, and young fellows and girls are going home together by night, in the gayeſt ſeaſon of the year; when every thing naturally inſpires warm deſires, and ſilence, ſecreſy, and darkneſs encourage them? When I was a young fellow at my apprenticeſhip, I was a great frequenter of theſe *occaſions*, and know them ſo well, that whatever others may think, I would not chuſe a wife that had often frequented them, nor truſt a daughter too much among thoſe rambling ſaints; old maids

may

may perhaps be allowed to revenge themſelves of the world, by growing religious at the eaſy rate of running from ſacrament to ſacrament; and they who are in pain to be provided with huſbands, may poſſibly find their account in frequenting thoſe *ſacred* aſſemblies; but I would adviſe others to go but ſeldom, and never to a greater diſtance than that they can return before ſun-ſet; leſt by frequenting them too much, they contract an idle diſpoſition of mind, and by ſtaying too late, they get into a *bad habit of body*. Nor are the conſequences of this practice conſidered in a political light, more favourable than in a moral; our church diſclaims all holy days, and I ſhould offend at once againſt truth and the rules of our church, if I ſaid that we obſerve any ſuch; but I preſume that the number of our idle days will fall very little ſhort of that number in the popiſh kalendar, and all the difference is, that their holy days are fixt, and, our idle days moveable; theirs are dedicated to ſome ſaint, and ours are devoted to ſome *occaſion*; theirs foſter ſuperſtition and idleneſs, and ſo do ours; theirs are ſignalized now and then by miraculous cures, by which the patient's health is ſeldom bettered; and ours by miraculous converſions *, by which the convert's morals are rarely mended; and to do the papiſts juſtice they deal more fairly in their miracles than we, for a man can ſee if a crooked limb be made ſtraight, becauſe it is the object of the ſenſe, but a miracle wrought inſtantaneouſly in the mind, muſt be taken upon the word of the patient or the parſon; but the truth is, their holy days, and our idle days, whatever miracles they may produce, do hurt to true religion: the people loſe many labouring days by them, and the country

* See two volumes publiſhed at Glaſgow by M. Gillies.

country is deprived of the fruit of their induſtry. I have ſeen above three thouſand people at one of theſe *occaſions*; but ſuppoſing that one with another there are only fifteen hundred, and that each of them one with another might earn ſixpence a day, every ſacrament, by its three idle days, will coſt the country much about 112*l.* 10*s.* *Sterling*, not including the days that they who live at a great diſtance muſt loſe in coming and going, nor the loſſes the farmer muſt ſuſtain, when *occaſions* happen in the hay, harveſt or ſeed-times; the man of buſineſs, when they chance to fall upon the market days; or the tradeſman when any particular piece of work is in hand that requires diſpatch: now ſuppoſing the ſacrament ſhould be adminiſtred only twice a year, in all our churches, which if it be not, it ought to be, theſe *occaſions*, as they are managed at preſent, will coſt Scotland at leaſt 235,000*l.* *Sterling*, an immenſe ſum for ſermons! the greateſt part of which might be ſaved, much diſorder and irregularity prevented, would the aſſembly be graciouſly pleaſed to appoint ſome particular Sundays in the four ſeaſons *, for the adminiſtration of this ſacrament, over all the kingdom. We were too fond of novelties, and perhaps eſtabliſhed practices founded on reaſon, and approved by long experience; and we could hardly have pitched upon a more unnatural method than the preſent, conſider it in what light you will; for if the deſign of this ſacrament, next to ſetting forth the death of our Lord, be to remain as a pledge of love and charity among chriſtians, it does not with us ſeem at all to anſwer the deſign; as

* This was the method for ſeveral years about the time of the reformation.

as our congregations like diſcontented children, take a private hour as it were, and eat their bread by themſelves in a corner; whereas all the reſt of the chriſtian world, do chriſtian like communicate together three times in the year; and as they ſhew forth the ſame meritorious death, they ſhew it forth at the ſame ſeaſon, and like brethren ſit down at once to the ſame love feaſt.

But beſides this, the great noiſe that we make about theſe *occaſions*, leads our people to lay too great a ſtreſs upon them, and to imagine that there is ſomething meritorious, nay, that the life of religion lies in hearing a great number of ſacramental ſermons; they ſerve nearly the ſame ends in our church, that confeſſion, and abſolution, do among the papiſts; our people put on a very demure look ſome days before the ſacrament; the gloom gradually gathers upon their faces as it approaches; and they look like criminals going to execution when the day is come; juſt ſo may it be ſeen in popiſh countries, in the ſeaſons ſet apart for confeſſion and penance; but in both countries the profeſſed repentance proves only a flaſh of devotion, and as matters were made up with the Deity, and all former accounts cleared, the papiſt ſoon puts off his penitential countenance, and the Preſbyterian lays by his ſacramental face, and they and we in a little time are the ſame men that we were before.

And as theſe *occaſions* make our people lay too great a ſtreſs upon the outward means, while they neglect the great end of all religion, I mean to better the heart, and reform the conduct; ſo they raiſe contention, heart burnings, envy, and factions among our clergy, while they contend for popularity, vie with one another who ſhall conveen the greateſt crowd, and work up the mob to the higheſt pitch of enthuſiaſm; and they often ſucceed

ſo

ſo well, that they bring the weak and ignorant, to the very brink of downright madneſs. I have ſeen ſcenes of this nature, that had much more of the fury of the bacchanalia, than the calm, ſerious, ſincere devotion of a chriſtian ſacrament. It is here that the miniſters diſplay the falſe eloquence which catches the crowd, and conſiſts in a ſtrong voice, a melancholy tone, and thundering out at random damnation, death, and hell-fire, and flames, devils, darkneſs and gnaſhing of teeth; any one who has good lungs, and can borrow the beggar's cant, and the merry Andrew's action, may become very popular, and make a great figure at an *occaſion:* for the contention there is not, who ſhall reaſon moſt juſtly, deliver moſt gracefully, or direct their diſcourſe in the beſt manner for bettering the heart, and reforming the manners of the audience; but who ſhall appear more frantick, cry loudeſt, ſpeak with the deepeſt, ſtrangeſt and moſt hollow tone; and be moſt wrapt up in myſtery, and ſcholaſtick terms. I have known theſe qualifications make nonſenſe triumph over ſenſe, ignorance be preferred to learning; and incoherent, unintelligible, and contradictory rhapſodies, be received with admiration by the gazing crowd; while plain, learned, and pious ſermons, delivered with a becoming modeſty and gravity, have been preached almoſt to the empty pews. Quintilian, aſſigning the reaſons why the ignorant orators were heard with more applauſe by the mob, than the ingenious and learned, paints ſo juſtly the methods by which our miniſters contend for popularity at the *occaſions*, that the paſſage is worth tranſcribing, *Clamant ubique, et omnia levata (ut ipſi dicunt) manu emugiunt, multo diſcurſu, anhelitu, jactatione, geſta, motuque capitis furentes—mire ad pullatum circulum facit—cum ille eruditus modeſtus et eſſe, et videri malit—at illi hanc*

vim appellant, que eſt potius violentia *. The art of managing mankind (ſays Mr. Addiſon, ſpeaking of quacks in phyſick) is only to make them ſtare a little, to keep up their aſtoniſhment and to let nothing be familiar to them; this art is perfectly well underſtood by our parſons, for at theſe *occaſions*, they try who ſhall make the people ſtare moſt; and ſometimes they make them ſtare ſo long and ſo eagerly, that the poor people turn almoſt ſtark ſtaring mad: we are damned an hundred times over in one day; and damned too, without any ſort of diſcretion; for moſt of our miniſters that I have had occaſion to hear, ſeem to have embraced, and to certainly propagate, Hoadly's notions of the ſacrament of the ſupper; and yet they go on damning us ſtill, when their maſter ſays, and they ſometimes ſay, that the communion is little more than a mere ceremony. Poor lay men I own ought not to preſume to dictate to the parſon, what notions he is to embrace, and teach; but I humbly hope that we have a right to expect that the parſon be conſiſtent with himſelf, ſo far at leaſt as not to damn us, where at other times he teaches us that there is no danger.

But as it is not likely that theſe opportunities of ſpeaking *great and ſwelling words* † will be given up, while men are ſo *preſumptious and ſelf-willed*; I ſubmit to your conſideration, whether it would not

* Quintil. Inſt. lib. ii. cap. 12. They always cry loud, and deliver all their diſcourſe in a ſort of extaſy, with a hollow bellowing tone, a frantick action, deep ſighs, furious geſtures, violent toſſing of their arms, and mad-like notions of their heads.—'tis wonderful what effect theſe things have upon the ſurrounding mob; a man of learning ſuits his pronunciation and action to his ſubject, chuſes to be modeſt, and to appear ſo; they call this delivering their diſcourſe with force, tho' it be rather with force.

† 2 Peter ii. 8.

not to be proper to pitch upon the place deſigned for the ſcene of the field preaching, at leaſt upon the communion Sunday, at a conſiderable diſtance from the church; this would draw off the mob, the contraſt between the ſolemn action within doors and the comical ſcene without, would be leſs ſtrikeing; the communicants would breathe a freer air, they would be leſs diſtracted in their devotions, have eaſier acceſs to come up to the table or to return to their ſeats, and the whole might be tranſacted with leſs buſtle and confuſion, and with more decency and order. As it is managed at preſent, it is liker any thing than the adminiſtration of the ſupper of our Lord; not a man among us would be content with a common meal ſerved up in ſuch confuſion; I am ſure that it is impoſſible for me, and I believe it is very difficult for any one, to carry up with him that ſedateneſs of ſoul, and calmneſs of thought, that I preſume to think are neceſſary, when he approaches the table of the Lord. How ſhould he? when he is forced to wreſtle through a crowd, to puſh and to be puſhed, ſtunned with a general hubbub, the ſeats rattling, the galleries ſounding, the people ſinging, the communicants joſtling one another in the crowded paſſages, ſome falling, others fainting, and in all corners of the church, hurry, confuſion, and noiſe. I never ſee our tables* filled up, but it gives me an idea of the diſtraction at Babel when the confuſion of languages began to be felt. I ſubmit it, whether the apoſtle's cenſure of the Corinthian church

* In the kirks in Scotland they have long tables, at which they ſit and communicate; they will hold about an hundred or more, and when theſe remove to make room for others, there is the utmoſt confuſion, as the kirk is crowded with ſpectators, and one part is ſtruggling to get from the table and the other wreſtling to get to it.

be not pertinent here, *That is not to eat the Lord's ſupper**.

PERHAPS the communicants ſhould be left a little more to their own meditations, at leaſt for my own part I could wiſh, that while the elements are handing about, there were obſerved (if it be poſſible) a ſolemn and univerſal ſilence, that we might have time for our private devotions, and an opportunity to aſk the bleſſing of God upon his word and ordinances; eſpecially as it is either forbidden, or become unfaſhionable with us, to do ſo when we take our ſeats or finiſh the ſervice. Theſe Things I have mentioned, and I ſubmit my thoughts to the wiſdom and candour of the rulers of our church. There ſtill remains a very ſolemn and intereſting part of our worſhip, I mean that of public prayer, upon which I beg leave with all ſubmiſſion to make ſome few remarks, earneſtly entreating that they may be conſidered with calmneſs and impartiality by your reverences, and the other members of our church; and that tho' my ſentiments ſhould not pleaſe, yet in charity you will believe that I wiſh well to the proteſtant cauſe, the intereſt of religion, and the purity and peace of the church of Scotland. Theſe, I preſume to think, would be greatly promoted, by the compoſition and eſtabliſhment of ſome devout liturgy, or form of prayer, for publick worſhip. Have patience, and hear me out! I was once as much prejudiced againſt a propoſal of this nature as you can be at preſent, and if you will conſider the inconvenience that attends our preſent way of worſhip as calmly as I think I have done, you may perhaps ſee the neceſſity and advantages of a form of prayer as clearly as I do.

I beſeech

* 2 Corinth. ii. 20.

I beſeech you then to reflect, that our preſent extemporary way of worſhip is contrary to the practice and opinion of all mankind, in all ages, and of all religions; until it was introduced amidſt the ferment and confuſion of the fifteenth century; for before that time, whatever was the object of mens worſhip, whatever the matter of their prayers, or however widely they differed in the articles of their creed, yet they agreed as unanimouſly in the uſe of forms of prayer for their publick worſhip, as they did in the belief of a God. Greeks and Romans, the Magi and the Mahometans, Jews and Chriſtians, have all agreed in this practice. I have often heard our Maſs John, honeſt man, urge the univerſal conſent and opinion of mankind, againſt the atheiſts, as a proof of the exiſtence of a Deity; if this argument be concluſive when applied to the firſt and greateſt article of religion, I mean the exiſtence of God, ſure it will be ſo too, with reſpect to the beſt and fitteſt way of worſhiping him. But what is ſtill more, God himſelf preſcribed this way of worſhip to the Jews, as in the caſes of murder, when the perſon who committed it was unknown; of ſuſpicion of adultery; and when the firſt fruits were preſented; his ſon our Saviour honoured this way of worſhip with his preſence (for the worſhip of the ſynagogues was by a form prayer;) he ſanctified it by his practice, for in his agony in the garden, he roſe up, awakened, aud rebuked the diſciples, returned to the ſame place, repeated the ſame form of words three times over; and, before he expired upon the croſs, he offered up his devotions, in the words of the twenty-ſecond Pſalm; he authorized it by his command, for our directory for prayer informs us, that our Lord's prayer, is not only a pattern for prayer, but itſelf a moſt comprehenſive prayer;

ſo that if the command of God himſelf, the example, practice, and command of his Son be ſufficient to point out, in what way he would be worſhiped, a form of prayer is pointed out for that purpoſe: whereas it cannot be proved that ever God commanded extemporary public prayer; that ever his Son attended worſhip performed in that way; that ever he practiſed it, or ever commanded it; nay I am not certain, that there is one example of extemporary publick prayer in all the Bible, at leaſt I am ſure there is not an Inſtance that will correſpond with our ſituation, or authoriſe us in the uſe of it, when ſo many and ſo great inconveniencies do attend it.

We complain, and very juſtly too, that the popiſh clergy are too aſſuming, and claim a ſuperiority over the laity, inconſiſtent with the natural rights of mankind, and the relation of brethren formed by the covenant of grace; pardon me, gentlemen, if I ſay that you claim a very extraordinary ſuperiority over the laity, in the caſe before us; every one of you claims an excluſive privilege of manufacturing our publick prayers, and aſſumes a right of making us ſay to the Deity, whatever he thinks fit. In the moſt momentous affair in which we can be concerned upon earth, we muſt depend entirely upon the diſcretion, honeſty, and ability of every private parſon, and take the words and matter of our addreſſes to our God and Maker, ſuch as he is pleaſed to give, without ever ſeeing, examining, or judging for ourſelves. This is really treating us as if we were children or fools; we allow that you have a right to offer our prayers; and is it not fit that we ſhould all ſpeak, the miniſter may be called the mouth of the congregation; but the mouth of the congrregation ſhould ſpeak the mind of the congregation. In

our

our congregations the mouth runs before the mind, and ſpeaks without giving us any opportunity of thinking what we ought to ſpeak, and often ſays things that we ſhould certainly reject, and ſometimes offers petitions that we ſhould abſolutely abhor, had we time calmly to examine them: our mouth leads us into the groſs blunder of preſenting our addreſſes to the Deity firſt, and next judging whether they be proper addreſſes after they are offered, when we cannot mend what is wrong, or alter, what is improper; we abſurdly begin where we ſhould end; for, in the natural order of things, the congregation ſhould firſt be ſatisfied that the prayers are proper to be offered, and then the miniſter ſhould offer them in their name; juſt as a prudent man will think before he ſpeaks; but in our *admirable* plan of worſhip the congregation ſpeaks by its mouth, before it has conſidered what it is to ſay; that is, the parſon offers up the petition, and the people may judge of its propriety after it is offered, if they pleaſe.

THE abſurdity here is ſo glaring, that it is aſtoniſhing that it eſcapes the obſervation of the laity; and it would not eſcape them in any other inſtance. Should the ableſt member in the houſe of commons, propoſe to offer an addreſs to his majeſty, in the name of the houſe, without communicating it to the members, the impropriety would be immediately perceived. When the eſtates, or counties, deſign to addreſs their ſovereign, offer your ſervice, and tell them, "Pray gentlemen give yourſelves no trouble about the matter, we and our brethren will each of us addreſs the King in our own way; truſt the whole affair to us, every individual of the cloth is more than ſufficient for the undertaking; it is your buſineſs to approve of whatever we are pleaſed to ſay for you;

or

or at leaſt, you may conſider how you like the addreſs, after it hath been offered." Take this advice, and try if the laity will be as compliſant with reſpect to the honour of their prince, and the concerns of their bodies, as they are with reſpect to the honour of their God and the intereſts of their ſouls; yet one would be tempted to think (if the common conſent of this nation were not againſt the opinion) that the laity are as much intereſted in an addreſs to the Deity, as in one to the King; and that they would be at leaſt as loath to truſt the firſt, as the laſt, to the diſcretion, ability, or honeſty of every man who chanced to put on a black coat or wear a ſtarched band. But the groſſeſt abſurdity will be ſwallowed down when it is in faſhion, and I think there can hardly be a groſſer one, than that a gentleman ſhould mount the pulpit, of whoſe principles or diſcretion we have no knowledge at all, and that this man ſhould have a right to dictate the prayers of a whole congregation. If we will believe the author of the Characteriſtics *, who ſeems to ſpeak from experience, there are among you many whoſe principles are very dangerous and very inconſiſtent with the religion of Jeſus; yet theſe men not only lead, but even compoſe the devotions of the people, and make us poor lay men addreſs our Maker upon any principles that they pleaſe.

I have come from my houſe a ſound orthodox chriſtian, and have hardly taken my ſeat in the church, when I have found myſelf praying, or at leaſt one was praying in my name, as a rank Socinian. I have been made an Arrian as to my prayers very often; and in ſhort, there has hardly any whimſical opinion been broached among the clergy

* Eccleſiaſtical Characteriſtics, publiſhed at Glaſgow 1756.

clergy for theſe forty years, that I have not ſometime or other found mixed with my public prayers, tho' for my part I am a plain old faſhioned man, and content myſelf with the apoſtles creed. Sometimes, indeed, for my heart I could not have told upon what particular principles my prayers were offered, they were ſo *excellently well contrived, and ſo free from all narrow notions*, that they would have ſerved a Jewiſh ſynagogue, a Mahometan moſque, or a congregation of Perſian magi, as well or better than a Chriſtian aſſembly. If the miniſter that officiates be a ſceptic, I am made to pray like a ſceptic; if an enthuſiaſt, he addreſſes God in my name, according to his own enthuſiaſtical notions; when he chances to be a factious firebrand, or a keen party man, tho' I be a very peaceable tradeſman, my prayers breathe faction, my devotions in public are flaming with party heat, and tinctured with the fury of his faction. It is well known, that when any diſputes happen, and differences ariſe among the clergy in their ſynods or aſſemblies, both ſides appeal to Heaven in their public prayers, and force the laity to appeal with them (we are not ſuppoſed to have any right to judge for ourſelves in theſe caſes;) and what is even worſe, by an unlucky change of miniſters, or by ſtepping into another church, I have often been made to appeal to heaven as an advocate for both ſides of the queſtion, and pray for and againſt each of the parties in one day: for tho' our churches have the appearance of the ſame worſhip, they are as different as the tempers, principles, and parties of the parſons who manufacture it; and this leads the laity into the dangerous blunder of offering contradictory petitions, and praying at different times, upon principles as oppoſite to one another, as light is to darkneſs. It is an uſual thing amongſt

amongſt us to pray for and againſt preſentations in one week; I have thanked God for his decrees of election and reprobation in the forenoon, and in the afternoon offered my humble thanks that all men have equal acceſs to ſalvation, by faith and virtue. In a word, there is no party, nor different principle among our clergy, with reſpect to which I have not been made to play faſt and looſe with the Deity, to aſk what I did not want, and to pray againſt what I moſt earneſtly wiſhed for. This we call worſhiping God! but did we deal ſo with our fellow men, they would call it mockery, and take it as a groſs affront: I cannot help thinking, gentlemen, that this will appear, even to yourſelves, hard treatment of the laity, and that you will acknowledge, that their judgment ought not to be ſo entirely made a property of, as to oblige them to have their publick worſhip offered upon what principles the parſon pleaſes to eſpouſe; or upon oppoſite principles, as the miniſter for the time is of this or the other party. One of your cloth complains that we betray * viſible impatience till prayer be over; is it any wonder if we do? for as it is managed at preſent, prayer is to us a very dangerous part of worſhip; for as that judicious gentleman obſerves, *A great deal more, a vaſt deal more, depends upon our performance of this duty with judgment and propriety, than moſt people ſeem to be aware of.* They who are aware of this, cannot help being impatient and uneaſy, when a duty of ſuch vaſt importance is truſted to every individual of the clergy; and they who ſeldom think of its nature or importance will always eſteem it a dry and lifeleſs part of our ſervice.

* Mr. Fordice's Edification by publick Inſtitutions.

I am

I am apt to think, that it is ſometimes happy for our laity that they only hear prayer as they do ſermons, and cannot, I believe, as it is at preſent performed, or leaſt I am ſure do not join in it, for tho' it be criminal not to worſhip God in public, yet it ſeems to be as great if not a greater crime to offer an irrational worſhip, to inſult him with contradictory petitions with miniſters of oppoſite parties, and to have our devotions tinctured with the ſpirit of faction, the wild dreams of enthuſiaſts, the dangerous notions of ſceptics, and the abſurd follies of men whoſe heads are filled with vapours and whims. Tho' theſe ſhould ſometimes be mixed with your diſcourſes, the hardſhip and danger would not be half ſo great. If they did inſtruct, they might amuſe; and we needed not embrace your notions unleſs we pleaſed; our own reaſon might expel the poiſon. But when they are wrought into our publick prayers, there remains no remedy; we muſt take theſe as you are pleaſed to give them, or go away without public worſhip.

The popiſh clergy indeed put a great hardſhip uuon the laity, by offering their prayers in an unknown tongue; but tho' the hardſhip be great, it admits of ſome remedies; they may have their prayers tranſlated into their reſpective languages; they may have them explained by thoſe that underſtand the language; and conſtant uſe of the ſame forms, may in time enable them to annex proper ideas to the words: but the hardſhip put upon us admits of no remedy; we muſt offer what prayers every clergyman pleaſes, we muſt underſtand them the beſt way we can, we muſt pick up the words as we can catch them, according to the ſtrength of your voices, the diſtinctneſs of your pronunciation, and the largeneſs of the church; the fall

of

of a Bible, the opening of a ſeat, or a cough in any corner of the church, will loſe us half a ſentence; and yet if we would pray with the underſtanding, we muſt collect the ſeveral parts of the ſentence, ſupply the words that are loſt, compare it with what went before, examine, approve, and offer it; and this muſt be all done in a breath. I queſtion whether the parſon could perform this taſk himſelf; and I am convinced that it is impoſſible for the ſlow and ignorant part of the audience; eſpecially as ſome of you ſpeak ſo faſt, that we cannot keep pace with you barely in hearing what you ſay; others deliver ſo ſlowly, that our memories cannot ſerve us to collect the ſeveral parts of the ſentence; ſome are ſo fond of new and learned words, that one half of the congregation cannot know their meaning; and many of you have ſuch a perplexed, intricate way of expreſſing yourſelves, that we find it impoſſible to diſcover the import of your petitions; and perhaps would find this a difficult taſk, tho' we had an opportunity to conſider them at leiſure in our cloſets.

So that putting all theſe difficulties together, I imagine that it will appear that the laity of the kirk of Scotland lie under greater hardſhips, with reſpect to public worſhip, than the laity of any church upon earth; and this hardſhip is made ſtill more galling to thoſe who have ſenſe enough to feel it, by the pompous harangues that we are frequently entertained with, upon the privileges that we poſſeſs above other chriſtians, the religious liberty we enjoy, and the ſingular purity of our worſhip. Sure, gentlemen, you muſt mean *yourſelves*, when you aſcribe theſe great bleſſings to our church, or you inſult us in the more cruel manner; if you mean that you enjoy great privileges, and a moſt extenſive liberty, it is very true; for you

pray

pray what you pleaſe, you ſing what you pleaſe, you teach what you pleaſe, and our whole public worſhip is ſo much of your own manufacturing that there can hardly be found room for a verſe or two of ſcripture, and theſe you chuſe as you pleaſe; in a word, every pariſh miniſter is a little pope, ſubject to none but a general council, and, like the great pope, not ſubject to that, but when he pleaſes: for it ſeems to be a point as much diſputed in the preſbyterian church, whether a miniſter is obliged to ſubmit to the ſentence of a general aſſembly, as it is in the popiſh, whether his holineſs ought to yield obedience to a general council. So that it muſt be acknowledged, that you enjoy a great many privileges, and a moſt extenſive liberty. But pray what privileges, do we enjoy, when one man's judgment preſcribes to a whole pariſh? when we muſt pray for or againſt whatever party the parſon pleaſes? offer our devotions according to the religious or political principles that the miniſter for the time chuſes to embrace? ſhift ſides as your humours change, and addreſs our God, as Arrians, Socinians, or Sceptics, as the gentleman in the pulpit is inclined?——Sure, if our civil liberty were not ſomething more ſubſtantial, we ſhould be the greateſt ſlaves in Europe!—Again, what purity can there poſſibly be in our worſhip, when the paſſions, prejudices, and whimſical opinions of every miniſter may, and do mix with it? I have always been at a loſs to determine whether your confidence in entertaining us with ſuch harangues, and your power of face in keeping your countenances, ſtifling the laugh, or our ſtupidity in not perceiving the groſs affront, and patience in not reſenting it, were moſt to be admired. I cannot imagine you are ſo weak as to think with the bulk of our people, that our worſhip muſt of conſequence

quence be pure, if it be different from the practice of the church of Rome; and that we can only err upon the ſide of ſuperſtition. If this be your opinion, it reſembles the conduct of ſome germans, of whom I have read, who, for fear of the roman army, ran into a river and were drowned. Juſt ſo the greateſt part of our people (for I believe better things of you) conclude that our worſhip muſt be pure, if we do not worſhip images, pray to ſaints, or adore the virgin Mary, tho' it be mixed with the whimſical notions, enthuſiaſtic opinions, and ſilly noſtrums of every quack doctor in divinity. It would be happy if you would content yourſelves, with inſulting the people only, with ſuch harangues; but you often make them inſult their God, or at leaſt, you do it in their names, by thanking him for eſtabliſhing a pure worſhip which he did not eſtabliſh; a work which cannot poſſibly be pure; and which even in our own opinion is not pure; for if the moderate party conſiſts of ſuch miniſters as the author of the Characteriſtics * (who is ſaid to be one of your order) has repreſented them to the world, God have mercy upon the ſouls committed to their care! and may the Almighty pity and relieve the congregations whoſe devotions they compoſe, dictate, and offer. Yet in all probability if the moderate men were to write Characteriſtics, they would give us as forbidding a picture of the party that our author is pleaſed to call orthodox. What then muſt become of us poor lay men, whoſe ſouls were bandied about between the factions, and our prayers offered ſometimes upon the principles of the one, and ſometimes upon the principles of the other? would it not be happy for us, that we had ſome pious,

* Eccleſiaſtical Characteriſtics, publiſhed at Glaſgow 1756.

primi-

primitive form of prayer, that would ſecure the purity and reaſonableneſs of our prayers, let the miniſters private opinions be what they would? As things are at preſent, it is impoſſible that our ſervice can either be reaſonable, perfect, or pure; unleſs we can ſuppoſe, that our church has a privilege, which no church upon earth ever had or ever claimed; I mean, that no weak or whimſical miniſter, no factious fire-brand, no ſceptic or enthuſiaſt can mount our pulpits; or that after men of theſe characters get into them, they will pray better than they are able, upon principles that they do not believe, or with a calmneſs which they do not poſſeſs. Now ſuppoſing, that there are only an * hundred of our miniſters of ſome or other of the above characters, and that one with another each of them has 500 ſouls under his charge, there will be 50,000 perſons in Scotland, who never worſhip God in public in the way of his own appointment, and whoſe public worſhip muſt be dangerous to themſelves, and unacceptable to the deity. Where muſt the blood of theſe poor people fall, but upon the rulers of our church? who, tho' they have found by fatal experience, that all the ſubſcriptions in the world will not hinder men of pernicious principles from creeping into the church, yet will not take the only effectual method to prevent them from doing miſchief there.

But beſides the injuſtice of aſſuming to yourſelves a right to dictate to us what prayers you pleaſe; beſides the abſurdity of making us offer contradictory petitions, and leaving our public

* This is not an unreaſonable calculation in theſe latter ages, conſidering, that there was one of twelve who proved a traitor, even when our lord was viſibly preſent with our church.

worſhip expoſed to the whims and follies of the ſceptic and enthuſiaſt, there are many other inconveniences that attend our preſent method. Firſt, it is a queſtion whether the laity can join at all in our public prayers; for we muſt either ſuppoſe that they go along with the miniſter, offering every word as he utters it, or wait until he has finiſhed the ſentence, and then examine it, and give their aſſent. If the firſt be their method, it is evident that they place an abſurd and dangerous confidence in the honeſty and ability of the parſon, and embrace in their prayers all the whimſical notions and pernicious principles that he may chance to mix with them: and further, that many of them, will, like parrots, talk what they do not underſtand, ſince many words will occur, whoſe meaning and importance they are not able all at once to conceive. At leaſt I find it ſo with myſelf. Perhaps our people may be inſpired with more than ordinary penetration in the time of prayer; but, at other times, I find it difficult enough to make many of them comprehend an ordinary meſſage, delivered in the plaineſt words that I can poſſibly find; and after repeating it over and over again, have the mortification to find, that they miſunderſtand me, tho' the whole paſſage does not exceed two ſentences. That theſe men ſhould underſtand all the expreſſions in an extemporary prayer, and with their underſtandings and judgments keep pace with the miniſter for half an hour, or twenty minutes, to me appears impoſſible, and I believe, will appear even to you very miraculous. But ſuppoſe that our people wait till the miniſter has finiſhed the ſentence, and then compare the ſeveral parts, examine the whole, and give their aſſent, God knows how unfit maay of them are for this taſk; but let them be ever ſo fit, if a word be loſt, if one occurs whoſe meaning they do not underſtand,

ſtand, or if the arrangement of the words be perplexed, it is evident that they cannot give a rational aſſent: and if they take time to examine what may be ſuſpicious, to ſupply what is loſt, or to unravel what is perplexed, let them be as quick as they will, the ſubſequent ſentence will be loſt. I do not indeed ſuppoſe that the bulk of our congregations ever dreamt of theſe difficulties, becauſe they give themſelves no trouble about underſtanding, examining, or aſſenting; but content themſelves with being humble hearers, and perhaps in all their lives never once gave a ſincere and rational Amen to publick prayers; though hearing another pray, and joining in prayer, be very different things.

Another inconvenience that attends our way of worſhip is, that young gentlemen, juſt come from the univerſity, full fraught with philoſophy, and fond of ſhewing their learning, very injudiciouſly vent their notions in our public prayers. A young ſpruce gentleman the other Sunday converted us in an inſtant, from plain country people, into profound philoſophers, and theſe too of the dogmatical kind; for we told God Almighty many things concerning his own works, which the learned gentleman, it ſeems, thought he did not know before, many things that we neither underſtood nor believed; we travelled ſo high, that our heads began to turn, and after all loſt our gentleman, for fifteen minutes, amongſt things that he called vortices, and began indeed to ſuſpect that he was ſwallowed up by them, or had gone where Milton tells us all vain and empty things go,

Up whirl'd aloft,
Fly o'er the backſide of the world far off.
Into a limbo large and broad, ſince call'd
The paradiſe of fools †:

† Milt. Parad. Loſt, book iii. 495.

Whether he viſited that place or not we cannot tell, but we found him at laſt upon earth, chaſing a mole. Had he been pleaſed to tell us theſe things, ſtripped of their philoſophic garb, in a ſermon, ſome of them might have been entertaining, ſome of them uſeful, and moſt of them tolerable; but to make us inform the Deity of things that we neither knew nor believed, and as it were inſtruct our Maker in the nature, beauty, and order of his own works, (I humbly think) was imprudent and preſumptuous. However, he made a ſhift, by new coined words, and terms of art, to be far above the reach of our underſtandings; and to pray with him, we muſt have read Euclid, ſtudied Newton's works more than our Bibles, and brought half a dozen dictionaries to church with us, to help us to the meaning of his words. The gentleman however obtained his end, the people ſtared, and, when they came out, concluded that he was admirably learned, and that none was ſo fit to be their miniſter. Upon this whim, they vigorouſly oppoſe the ſettlement of a pious and prudent gentleman, preſented to the charge by the patron, and are moſt piouſly ſupported in their wiſe oppoſition by a ſet of the clergy, I ſuppoſe for conſcience ſake. But I beg pardon, digreſſion is a fault. My buſineſs is only with our public worſhip; and I flatter myſelf that you will own, that upon that Sunday it was but poorly performed: yet ſuch farces as theſe we are often forced to bear with; and inſtead of the humble expreſſions of penitents, the conciſe petitions of poor mortals, and the grateful thankſgivings of rational creatures, to their merciful God, our prayers frequently conſiſt of the fooliſh oſtentation of learning, and the harſh jargon of hard words.

NEITHER does our worſhip ſuffer more by the oſtentatious folly and pedantic humour of our young dominies, than by the natural and neceſſary decays of the invention, memory and judgment of our aged miniſters; for as the clergy are fooliſh enough to vie in the expences of dreſs, table, and equipage, with the landed gentlemen, moſt of them are unable, and all of them are unwilling to call an aſſiſtant, as long as they are able to creep up to a pulpit, and prattle out ſomething like a prayer; ſo that you will frequently find a man inventing and dictating the devotions of a congregation, who is ſuperannuated to all the other affairs of life. This man it ſeems has a right to make us addreſs our Maker, in what manner, and with what words he thinks proper; tho' in common converſation, we cannot help perceiving that his memory has loſt its ſtrength, that his underſtanding is decayed; and all the powers of his mind are ſadly declined. It would perhaps be cruel, to give inſtances of the blunders, blaſphemy, and nonſenſe that have been mixed with our prayers by this misfortune, tho' many inſtances might be produced; but it is (I humbly think) more cruel and highly unreaſonable, to put the aged miniſters under the neceſſity of expoſing their weakneſs, and diſhonouring the ſervice of their Maker; and the laity under the hardſhip, either of offering nonſenſe, or blaſphemy, inſtead of pious ardent, and expreſſive prayers, or of reducing their miniſter, to want and beggary in his old age, by forcing him to call an aſſiſtant whether he can maintain him or not; eſpecially, as all danger might be prevented, and all deficiencies ſupplied, by compoſing and eſtabliſhing a pious form of prayer; for he might read a prayer very devoutly, and diſtinctly, when he cannot invent readily, or

dictate an extemporary prayer to the congregation with propriety and judgment; or if he chanced to blunder, or pronounce inſtinctly, having the form before us, we could eaſily ſupply the defects; we could much better put up with trifling in his ſermons, and patiently hear him prattle about his ſubject and about it, becauſe we could ſupply our loſs, in ſome meaſure, by reading ſome of the beſt ſermons ourſelves, or to our families; but public prayer is a matter of that importance, that there is no poſſibility of ſupplying it by our own induſtry, no rectifying miſtakes after the prayer is offered, and no poſſibility of preventing very groſs and dangerous blunders, while we perform this part of our worſhip after the preſent method: for tho' our aged miniſters ſhould retain all the powers of their minds to the laſt, which is not the caſe with one in an hundred; tho' they ſhould be able to invent extemporary petitions, with propriety; yet as the organs of the body decay, it is impoſſible that they can expreſs them with that ſtrength of voice, and diſtinctneſs of pronunciation, which are neceſſary to us, before we can give a very rational aſſent, if we can at all give a rational aſſent to prayers that we never have examined; no, nor yet the miniſter himſelf. The weak voice, the trembling body, the want of teeth, and other infirmities incident to old age, do often render the pronunciation ſo indiſtinct, that in our preſent way of worſhip one half of the congregation is at as great a loſs, as if the gentleman prayed in an unknown tongue; or at moſt they can only pick up a word here and there, without any connexion. Let us ſuppoſe that among more than a thouſand miniſters, there are only eighty whoſe underſtandings, or bodily organs, are thus decayed, and that, one with another, each of them has

has five-hundred ſouls under his charge; it would be a misfortune to thoſe who are under the care of the firſt, if they did join in the public worſhip as it is performed amongſt them; and they who are under the care of the laſt cannot poſſibly do it; ſo that there muſt be in Scotland at leaſt forty-thouſand perſons, who are debarred from the moſt eſſential part of public worſhip, by the old age of our miniſters, joined with the abſurdity of our preſent plan; to which if we add the 50,000 I mentioned before, there will be ninety thouſand perſons in this nation who cannot worſhip God at all in public, or worſhip him a way unworthy of him, and dangerous to themſelves, whoſe blood muſt be crying to heaven againſt the rulers of our church. For whether the above calculations be allowed to be juſt or not, there muſt certainly be a very conſiderable number of our brethren in this diſtreſſed ſituation; unleſs we ſuppoſe, contrary to known matter of fact, that the miniſters of our church are not yet ſubjected to the ſame infirmities of body and mind that other men are ſubject to; and that they are ſecured, by ſome ſacred infallibility, from embracing enthuſiaſtical or ſceptical opinions.

But further, our worſhip as it is performed at preſent, is not only corrupted by the contrary petitions of contending parties; not only tinctured with the heats and animoſities that ariſe in ſynods and aſſemblies; not only mixed with the whimſical opinions, and pernicious principles of libertines and enthuſiaſts, that climb up into our pulpits; not only rendered obſcure and contemptible by the pedantry and affected learning of the younger, and the weakneſſes of mind and body of our older miniſters; but frequently interlaid with ill-timed compliments to the great, or the miniſter's favourites

vourites, and the groſſeſt abuſes of thoſe who have the misfortune to be out of favour. I could produce numerous inſtances of both, and, were it not an inviduous taſk, point out the perſons, places, and times. Upon the marriage of a certain noble peer in this nation, the parſon carried his compliments ſo far in the public prayers, that he exceeded all the bounds of decency, and made his female hearers bluſh; and I would bluſh to repeat to the rulers of our church in a letter the expreſſions that he made uſe of to the God of heaven and earth in the face of a congregation; ſo extravagant and ill choſen were his words, that the lady was forced to direct the clergyman, and intreat him to forbear his rude petitions. A miniſter, even in one of our royal burghs, obſerving a young gentleman, ſon to one of the magiſtrates, in church, after a journey to London, made all the congregation thank God that he had brought back their friends from foreign lands. Moſt men, I preſume, will remember how groſsly the royal commander of his majeſty's forces, during the laſt war, was abuſed by having his praiſes wrought into our public prayers, by rough and unſkilful hands; ſome allowances, I own, are to be made for the clergy in this inſtance; the augmentation ſcheme was then in agitation, and the weaker part of them fooliſhly thought, that this would pave the way for it.

On the other hand, he muſt be a great ſtranger in our congregations, or very heedleſs when he comes there, who has not obſerved that ſometimes a well meant zeal, and ſometimes too warm an attachment to party opinions with reſpect to religious ſubjects, and private reſentments too, have taught miniſters of keen paſſions, to uſe ſeveral expreſſions, not only inconſiſtent with the charity

of

of chriſtians, but even with the humanity of men; *Vex them in thy wrath, and plead with them in thy diſpleaſure through all eternity*, was the unchriſtian petition of Mr.——with a reſpect to papiſts; *Pour down the vials of thy wrath upon them, and burn their fleſh with fire*, was Mr. C—'s ungenerous wiſh. Nothing but heat of zeal and hurry of paſſion could have dictated theſe petitions; and I am far from thinking that many of our miniſters ſuffer themſelves to be driven to ſo great lengths. But all of them are ſubject to paſſions, and what is left to the diſcretion of the miniſter, is left alſo to the indiſcretion and paſſions of the man; and we frequently find the two laſt, where the firſt was deſigned to take place. Many inſtances could be given of the ill-timed flattery of friends, and unchriſtian expreſſions with reſpect to enemies, that have been vented in our public prayers; but I am tender of the reputation of the clergy, and do not chuſe to expoſe their errors, farther than is abſolutely neceſſary to ſhew the danger and abſurdity of our preſent way of worſhip; and to perſuade them to recover and ſecure its purity and decency; and therefore, I humbly intreat you to conſider, whether the ill-timed, ill-choſen compliments of ſycophants upon the one hand, and the unchriſtian expreſſions of keen zealots upon the other, do not render our public worſhip contemptible and dangerous; and whether there be any thing ſo likely to prevent them from indulging their humours, to the diſhonour of God and diſgrace of religion, as ſome well-choſen, pious, public form of prayer.

After flattery we may mention politics, in which our miniſters will be dabbling, in ſpite of grace, nature, and common ſenſe, as another very fruitful ſource of blunders in our public worſhip,

few

few of them have genius, fewer ſtill have ſufficient intelligence, and all of them are at too great a diſtance from the ſeat of government, or to comprehend the ſecret intrigues of courts, or to perceive, in ſpite of the varniſh by which they are diſguiſed, the real views of parties; yet all of them will be meddling, and in every diſpute our prayers muſt take a ſide, and the poor lay-men muſt addreſs their Maker, ſometimes upon the faith of a fooliſh rumour, and often upon the credit of a common news. To ſay nothing of the times very wittily but very truly deſcribed by Butler in his Hudibras,

When goſpel trumpeter, ſurrounded
With long-ear'd rout, to battle ſounded
And pulpit, drum eccleſiaſtic,
Was beat by fiſt inſtead of a ſtick

Not (I ſay) to mention theſe days, whoſe hiſtory will be an eternal diſgrace to our religion, and would furniſh as many inſtances of nonſenſe and blaſphemy vented in our public prayers, as would be ſufficient to fill up a large volume; even in latter days, politics have introduced very groſs abſurdities, into our public ſervice. I am not yet an old man, and I remember to have been made to pray, that God would pull down *the bloody houſe of Auſtria*; during the laſt war, I earneſtly begged that he would build it up; now I begin to give broad hints that I would have it pulled down again; and am expecting every Sunday, to be made to deſire it, in a formal manner. The Intereſts and leagues of the ſtates of Europe ſhift ſo frequently, that we are often flung out in our prayers, and pray for our enemies as if they were our friends, and againſt our friends as if they were enemies. Would our miniſters be

contented

contented to make us pray in general for our friends, and againſt the devices of our enemies, we ſhould never be wrong: but they chuſe to mention whom they mean, leſt omniſcient wiſdom ſhould miſtake, or at leaſt that their people may know that they are great politicians, and very zealous for the public good. Many a time have I thanked God for giving us glorious victories, when we have been ſhamefully beat; for inſpiring courage into our troops, when they have run away; for ſucceſs granted to our arms in battles that were never fought; and for deliverances from plots that were never formed. Our public worſhip, in the preſent way, has always been and will always be tinctured with the ſpirit of party, and made the property of faction in church and ſtate. When the famous Cambuſlang's converſion was going on (I ſhall never forget it), one Sunday morning I was made to thank God for the manifeſtation of his power in that converſion, and intreat him to continue the great work he had begun; in the afternoon, by an unlucky change of miniſters, I was made to pray that God would put a ſtop to the deluſions of the devil, by which the ignorant and ſimple were deceived, and give us grace to reſiſt that ſpirit of enthuſiaſm that had gone out into our land: thus what I aſcribed to God in the morning, I aſcribed to the Devil in the afternoon; and what I had requeſted God to promote, I requeſted him too to give me grace to reſiſt. I prayed long and earneſtly with Walpole's enemies, before their intrigues and my prayers could pull him down; and when he fell, I was made to thank God for the great deliverance; though it was ſoon diſcovered, that it was nothing more than a ſtruggle for power between parties, and a matter of no moment to me or my country which of the parties was in or out: however, all ranks contributed

buted ſomething to raiſe the clamour; the mob made bonfires, the magiſtrates rung bells, the miniſters gave their prayers, and the mountain brought forth a mouſe.

Nay, I have known the private piques and little quarrels between the parſon and his neighbours, introduced into our public worſhip and made a part of our prayers: even when the parſon was the firſt aggreſſor, he had the aſſurance to complain to God (as he called it), and what was ſtill more unreaſonable, made his pariſhoners complain with him, or at leaſt, he complained in their names, though moſt of them were very ſenſible, that he himſelf had done the injuſtice; how his complaints were received in heaven I cannot tell, but I know that they had their effects upon earth, for his antagoniſt, unable to bear the ſtaring of the congregation every Lord's-day, was forced to ſit down under the injuſtice. It is hard to determine in this reſpect, whether you have the meaneſt opinion of your God or your hearers; for it ſeems you think that both are obliged to ſhift ſides as you are pleaſed to direct them, and, right or wrong, be ſtill of the party which the parſon for the time thinks fit to embrace. That you ſhould treat the laity with ſo great contempt in this caſe, is not ſo ſurprizing, as you may be convinced from long experience, that they will ſwallow down the groſſeſt abſurdities in their public prayers, and truſt the propriety of their worſhip upon Sunday, to the diſcretion and ability of a man, whoſe folly and weakneſs perhaps they laugh at all the week. But I own it is amazing that you can uſe ſuch freedom with the Deity, to deſire him to do and undo as the fancy ſtrikes you, or your deſigns chance to alter.

Our prayers are, for the moſt part, too hiſtorical and ſeem rather deſigned to inſtruct the congregation,

gregation, than to confeſs their ſins, expreſs their wants, or offer their grateful thankſgivings. I do not at all ſuppoſe that you are ignorant, as our people ſeem to be, of the difference between preaching and praying, or that you are not ſenſible that a very good ſermon, will make but a very bad prayer; but I cannot help thinking that you comply too far with the popular taſte in this reſpect, and ſtrive to pleaſe, by giving our public prayers as much the air and manner of a ſermon as poſſible; or knowing that many of your people judge of the propriety and excellency of a prayer by its length, to come up to the common ſtandard you are forced to fill up a gap with what materials come firſt to hand; and this I am more apt to believe to be the caſe, becauſe we ſometimes find half a dozen of ſentences from ſcripture poured into our prayers all at once, without the leaſt connexion among themſelves, or the leaſt relation to what went before, or follows after; and frequently too, without the leaſt affinity to any of the parts of prayer. What Mr. Fordyce means, by that certain * happy irregularity in our public prayer, which he is pleaſed to recommend, I profeſs I know not; but I know very well, that there is a certain unhappy irregularity in moſt of ours, that renders them very improper for public worſhip. The ſeveral parts of prayer are moſt abſurdly confounded, though they require very different diſpoſitions of heart; confeſſion is jumbled with thankſgiving; petition is mixed with narration; and ſometimes we have all the parts of prayer in one ſingle ſentence. By theſe means the mind is held in ſuſpence, and cannot ſettle to that humility, conviction, and ſorrow, that ought to attend confeſſion; nor is it raiſed to that

* Edification, &c. page 15.

warm

warm gratitude, and ardent love, that ought to enliven our thankſgivings; neither is it filled with that ſenſe of dependence, nor formed to that ſerious earneſtneſs and lively faith, with which our petitions ought to be ſent forth.

INSTEAD of theſe, amuſed with the novelty of expreſſion, and diſtracted with the quick and irregular ſucceſſions of the ſeveral parts of prayer, it fluctuates between theſe ſenſations, and feels not much of any of them. When all the powers of the ſoul ſhould be employed in their proper places, and making their greateſt efforts to offer a ſpiritual worſhip to the Father of ſpirits, our curioſity is only awake, and we are liſtening to a prayer no otherways than we do to a ſermon. I would beg leave further to obſerve, that our extemporary worſhip in the church, produces very bad effects with repect to our worſhip in our families; for as praying to God extempore is the prevailing faſhion, and as our people are taught to deſpiſe worſhip offered by a form, ſo thoſe of them who want memory, learning, and invention, to expreſs themſelves extempore with propriety, and have modeſty to be aſhamed of indecent expreſſions, and reflection to think of the danger of unreaſonable and unchriſtian petitions, never pray with their families at all. On the other hand, when ignorance and ſelf-ſufficiency meet in the maſter of a family, their worſhip of conſequence is a miſerable mixture of nonſenſe, error, and blaſphemy. The moſt ignorant are always the moſt preſuming, and the leſs ſenſe that a man has of the nature and importance of prayer, the more readily will he venture upon extemporary worſhip. In fact it is true, that many of our people who can hardly repeat their creed, and know very little more of their religion than a few hard words that they have gleaned out of our catechiſms,

catechisms, imitate our parsons in praying extempore; and approach their Maker with as great familiarity, as they would do to their neighbours, and with much less respect and reverence than they dare treat their laird. Good God! what pityful scenes have I seen of this kind! what rude and shocking expressions, what blasphemous petitions have I heard! how often have I trembled when the ignorant and proud enthusiast kneeled down with his family to his extemporary worship! how often have I shuddered at the whimsical notions that he wrought into our prayers, the insolent and unchristian expressions which he used, and the nonsense that he offered in our name. How often has my heart bled in secret for the sad situation of many miserable families, who, by our unhappy attachment to extemporary prayer, either want family-worship altogether, or offer their worship in such a manner as dishonours God, disgraces religion, and is very dangerous to themselves! but I would very far exceed the bounds of a letter, and I am afraid weary-out your patience, if I should endeavour to lay before you all the inconveniencies that attend our present way of worship; and I flatter myself, if you will add to these already taken notice of, the blunders of ignorance, the flights of vanity, the needless silly repetitions, the unguarded expressions, and the childish thoughts that are mixed, with our prayers (and must be mixed with them, unless you can suppose that all our ministers are men of the greatest abilities, elocution, and prudence) you will see, that our present way of worship is defective, unreasonable, and dangerous; and that the hardships that the laity labour under, and the danger to which they are exposed, can only be removed by some devout and approved form of prayer.

To

To ſupport the preſent abſurd practice, to make the laity ſit quietly down with the injuſtice done them, and to blind their eyes that they may not perceive the diſadvantages that they labour under, and the danger to which they are expoſed, it has been ſaid that a form of prayer will limit the inſpiration of the Spirit; that it deadens the devotion of people; that all the wants of a chriſtian congregation cannot be expreſſed by a form: and ſome have been ſo fooliſh as to ſay, that it is unlawful to worſhip by a form of prayer. Will you pardon my preſumption, and hear me with patience, if I humbly offer my thoughts upon theſe heads; I hope you will. As to the firſt, I might boldly appeal to your own conſciences, and aſk you, *In the name of God Do you believe that you are inſpired? Have you indeed ſo mean an opinion of the underſtanding and judgment of the laity, as to imagine that any of them, who think at all, can ever be brought to believe, that the prayers we commonly hear are dictated by the Holy Ghoſt? Or have you ſo little regard to the honour of God and the intereſts of religion, as to aſcribe your extemporary effuſions to the Holy Spirit?* No, I am perſuaded that none but the rankeſt enthuſiaſts will ever urge this argument againſt a form of prayer; and I will beg leave to aſk ſuch, are the words or the matter of your prayers, or both, inſpired? That the words are not inſpired, is evident from the difficulty that you frequently have to find proper words; from the improper and ſometimes indecent expreſſions that fall from you; from the ill-timed pauſes that you are forced to make, and that moſt uſeful ſupplement of coughing, groaning, and ſpitting, that muſt come in to your aſſiſtance. But ſuppoſing that you were indeed inſpired with words, it would be of ſmall importance to yourſelves or to us, unleſs the matter of your prayers

be

be inſpired too: and if the matter of them be inſpired, your prayers are of equal authority with the ſcriptures themſelves, and ſhould be entered into the cannon. I know not how to excuſe the negligence of the people of this nation, in ſuffering ſo much ſound doctrine to be loſt; it might have cleared up ſome difficult paſſages in ſcripture, and decided ſeveral important diſputes. I know not what to ſay for this piece of negligence, unleſs our people think that all things neceſſary for chriſtians to know, to believe, and to practiſe, are revailed in the holy ſcriptures; and that they may be taught by them what to aſk in prayer, and how to regulate their lives; and if this be true, your inſpiration is a very great gift beſtowed for very poor purpoſes, only to ſave you the pains of ſearching the ſcriptures, and the trouble of compoſing a form of prayer by the inſtructions and examples contained in them. The heathen poets themſelves had a greater reverence for the Deity than this, for it was a maxim among them

Nec deus interſit, niſi dignus vindice nodus
Inciderit——*

I ſubmit, whether you do not tranſgreſs againſt this rule, by introducing the inſpiration of the Holy Spirit, if the ſcriptures be ſufficient to direct us what to aſk in prayer; and if they be not ſufficient for this, the revelation of the will of God for our ſalvation is defective in a very important point; and neither the prophets, nor the apoſtles, no nor our Saviour himſelf, though he enterprized it, have taught us how to pray. But ſuppoſing that it were neceſſary, that the words and matter of our prayers

* Hor. Art. Poet. Never let a god be introduced, unleſs there happens to be ſome difficulty worthy of ſuch an agent.

ſhould

ſhould be inſpired by the Holy Ghoſt; why might not a number of pious and learned divines, met together with ſuch an intereſting and great deſign as that of compoſing a form of prayer for a whole church, have as much reaſon to expect, and be as likely to receive the aſſiſtance of the Holy Spirit, as a private clergyman inventing the tranſient prayer of a particular congregation? But this ſuppoſed inſpiration in our extemporary way, will involve us in very great, nay inſuperable difficulties? for we ſhall be as much puzzled where to find our miraculous inſpiration, as the papiſts are where to fix their wonderful infallibility. For if we ſuppoſe that this inſpiration is confined to any one of the ſeveral ſects that uſe extemporary prayer, we preſcribe to the Holy Spirit, and limit him with a witneſs, and ſhall be ſadly perplexed to determine to which particular party this wonderful privilege is given. If we ſuppoſe that this privilege is common to the miniſters of all the ſects, then we muſt conclude that the Holy Ghoſt inſpires oppoſite petitions to men of oppoſite principles, and directs one ſect to pray againſt another: for inſtance, if he inſpires the Burghers * to pray againſt the principles of their ſeceding brethren the Antiburghers, and to cut them off from their communion by excommunication; we cannot ſuppoſe that he inſpires the Antiburghers to return the compliment: and if he inſpires the miniſters of theſe ſects to pray againſt the principles of the church eſtabliſhed by law, he does not direct the miniſters of the eſtabliſhed church, in their public prayers, to call the ſeceſſion a dangerous ſchiſm: that the miniſters of the ſeve-

* Burgher and Antiburgher are the names of two parties among the Scotch ſeceders, taken from the cauſe of their quarrel, an oath impoſed in ſome of the royal burroughs in Scotland upon thoſe they admit into the corporation.

ral

ral ſects do pray for the ſucceſs of their ſeveral parties, and that God would hinder the ſpreading of the principles of the other ſects, is evident to all the world. Now, unleſs we would be guilty of the boldeſt blaſphemy, and ſay that the Holy Ghoſt chimes in with the principles of the parſon, whatever they be (as the people are forced to do), we muſt conclude that this inſpiration is not granted but to one of the ſects; and I ſhall only requeſt each of them to uſe a form of prayer, until they ſhall be able to prove that this gift of inſpiration belongs to them.—And that the eſtabliſhed church, with which I have to do, may be more willing to hear and grant my requeſt, I will produce ſome ſtrong preſumptions that it does not belong to them: indeed the inſtances that I have given above, are more than ſufficient for this purpoſe; but I ſhall further add, firſt, that if the confeſſion of faith be true, none of our miniſters are inſpired in their prayers; for there all mankind are divided into two claſſes, the elect and the reprobates; yet it is evident beyond all poſſibility of diſpute, that the elect pray as if it were poſſible that they may be damned; and the reprobates as if it were poſſible that they may be ſaved; and yet it is impoſſible that the Holy Spirit inſpires either of them with theſe prayers, unleſs we be ſo impious as to imagine that he directs them to pray upon falſe principles, and inſpires them to pray for or againſt what he knows can never happen; and though ſome of you urge this argument of inſpiration againſt your adverſaries, yet our church has in fact very fairly diſclaimed it, by publiſhing and authoriſing a directory for public prayer; unleſs we would ſuppoſe them ſo preſumptuous as to direct the Holy Spirit how to pray. In truth, our preſbyterian inſpiration, is as myſterious and as uſeleſs a gift as the

popiſh infallibility. The popiſh church has an infallibility lodged ſomewhere, but ſhe knows not where to find it in time of need; we preſbyterians have an inſpiration among us, but we know not to which of all the ſects it belongs. The infallible church is filled with diſputes, which her infallibility cannot determine; and the inſpired church has nonſenſe, contradiction, and whimſical opinions, vented in her public prayers, which her inſpiration does not prevent; the infallible church has the moſt unreaſonable and abſurd creed of any church upon earth; and the inſpired church has, and will have (while ſhe adheres to her preſent plan), a very defective, unreaſonable, and dangerous kind of public worſhip: and fully, and juſtly, does the Providence of heaven confute the vain pretenſions of preſumptuous men.

But it may be ſaid, and it has been ſaid, that this gift of inſpiration is not univerſal to all our miniſters, nor uniform and conſtant to any of them, but granted now and then by fits and ſtarts, ſomething (I ſuppoſe) like the quakers ſpirit. I cannot help thinking, if this be the caſe, that the quakers proceed more judiciouſly than we; they patiently wait in ſilence till they feel, or imagine they feel the influences of the Spirit; but if he does not come, we venture to do without him: they humbly ſubmit to his will, to inſpire whom he pleaſeth; but we confine him to the miniſter: they ſtop ſhort when his influence ceaſes: but we run our glaſſes, let his influences ceaſe when they will. I would therefore humbly propoſe, either that, like quakers, we ſhould wait the Spirit, and permit any one of the congregation, who chanced to be inſpired, to dictate our devotions; or that a form of prayer be compoſed and authoriſed, only to be uſed when the miniſter feels no inſpiration. Let him

have

have full liberty to depart from the form, when he feels upon his mind the miraculous influences of the Holy Spirit ſuggeſting the matter of his prayers. By this method, we ſhall gain two very conſiderable advantages; firſt, we ſhall always worſhip, either by inſpiration or by an approved form, and be certain (unleſs the parſon deceives us), that the ignorance, affectation, ill-timed zeal, pride, or paſſions of the man himſelf, cannot tincture our public worſhip, or mix themſelves with our prayers. And next, we ſhall diſcover when our parſons are inſpired; for, as things are managed at preſent, this miracle is as much loſt in our preſbyterian church, as the famous miracle of tranſubſtantiation is among the papiſts. In both churches there is a wonderful manifeſtation of almighty power, yet no one is able to perceive it in either. The papiſts are convinced that bread and wine are converted into fleſh and blood, though to all the ſenſes they remain bread and wine ſtill; we preſbyterians are perſuaded that our miniſters are ſometimes inſpired, though we cannot tell when the inſpiration begins or ends; and though our miniſters in this caſe, lie under the ſame misfortune that Hudibras did,

When with greateſt art he ſpoke,
You'd think, he talked like other folk:

ſo it unluckily fares with them; when they pray moſt by inſpiration, they only pray like other people; and all my attention and ſkill has never been able to diſcover the inſpiration in one ſingle inſtance. But by the method that I am propoſing, we ſhall diſcover that the inſpiration immediately begins, when the miniſter departs from the eſtabliſhed form, and perhaps we may make another diſcovery; I mean, that the rage of party, the ſpirit

of pride and enthuſiaſm, as frequently inſpire our miniſters, as the ſpirit of peace and love. In a word, let thoſe miniſters who have pride enough to believe, and preſumption to affirm that they are inſpired, and can find people ſo ignorant and credulous as to believe them, or ſo tame and indifferent as to truſt their devotions to an imaginary inſpiration, let theſe I ſay, uſe the preſent method, but have pity upon us who ſee the difficulty, diſadvantages, and great danger of our preſent way of worſhip.

As we cannot find in ſcripture any promiſe of ſuch a gift, as we are convinced that there can be no need of it (unleſs we ſuppoſe that the Holy Ghoſt has not fully revealed the will of God for our ſalvation); as we are abſolutely certain that you are not all inſpired, and have no reaſon to believe that any one of you is ſo; we preſume moſt humbly and moſt earneſtly to requeſt, that ſome pious form of prayer may be compoſed and authoriſed. The only inſpiration that is promiſed in ſcripture, that is neceſſary or that can be uſeful, is that the Holy Spirit will inſpire the hearts of the faithful with affections proper for this important duty; ſuch as ſhame and ſorrow in confeſſion, an humble chriſtian hope of obtaining what we aſk in our petitions, gratitude and love in our thankſgiving, and ſuch other affections as are ſuitable to the ſeveral parts of prayer; and no man I believe will ſay that the Holy Spirit cannot, or prove that he will not, inſpire our hearts with theſe affections, as eaſily and as readily when we pray by a form, as when we pray without one. And as far as prayer may be conſidered as one of the means of inſpiring theſe affections, a form ſeems better calculated to anſwer that purpoſe, in public aſſemblies, than extemporary effuſions: for in the extempore way,

way, the hearer (if he has any ſenſe of the nature and importance of prayer) muſt begin the duty with a trembling heart, and go through it with a continual diffidence, as he truſts it entirely to the diſcretion of another man; ſometimes to a man whom he never ſaw before, and always to a man who has not ſo much as calmly conſidered it himſelf. He muſt often ſuſpend his aſſent, when he is not ſatisfied of the propriety of the expreſſion; he muſt loſe the ſenſe, where the ſentence is intricate, and through the whole, be in perplexity, ſuſpicion, fear, and real danger. Whereas when prayers are offered by a form, no word needs eſcape him, he underſtands every word, he perceives the connection of every ſentence; and let the miniſter's judgment be ever ſo weak, his learning ever ſo little, his manner of expreſſing himſelf perplexed, his principles pernicious, his paſſions ever ſo keen, and his party prejudices ever ſo violent, yet in ſpite of all theſe he offers a reaſonable ſervice, and breathes forth the warm feelings of his ſoul, in decent, devout, heart-affecting, and heart-approved prayers. This obſervation may in a great meaſure obviate the ſecond objection; I mean that a form of prayer does not ſo much enliven the devotion of the people; but I beg leave further to obſerve, that they who are uſed to worſhip in the extemporary way cannot be competent judges in this caſe; becauſe they have not fairly made the experiment, but reaſon only from ſpeculation. When they drop into a place where forms are uſed, they come in with ſtrong prejudices, they are entire ſtrangers to the form, and are perplexed in all the parts of it.—It happens with them in this caſe, as it does with men in every other thing, what they have not been accuſtomed to, appears ſtrange, what they are unacquainted with, ſeems perplexed,

and what they do not know reaſons for, is apt to appear unreaſonable. It may be too, that the ignorant miſs the unnatural cant, the frantic geſtures, and fearful diſtortions of the face, that in their opinion are eſſential parts of prayer. But let a man of ſenſe and candour, make himſelf maſter of a form, and try the experiment for a year or two, by attending carefully to prayers offered in that way; and then and not till then, will he be able to determine whether the form, or the extemporary method, has the nobleſt effect to enliven his devotions. At leaſt it is certain, that many who have tried both, give their opinion in favour of a form; and that they who uſe a form of prayer, conſtantly affirm that they feel it ten times more enlivening, and better calculated to inſpire devout affections, than extemporary effuſions. And there muſt be ſomething in it, becauſe the profeſſors of all religions under the ſun have choſen this method; the chriſtian church univerſally uſed it till the fifteenth century, and indeed may be ſaid to do ſo at preſent, for we make ſuch a ſmall part of the catholic church, that our practice hardly deſerves to be conſidered as an exception

I ſhall not dwell long upon the ſpeculative arguments that are offered by either ſide, becauſe ingenious men will always find ſomething plauſible to ſay in defence of a practice that anſwers their purpoſes. They who uſe forms, ſay that their minds are free from all diſtraction, and fear, and have nothing elſe to do but attend to the object of their prayers, and maintain upon their minds a conſtant and lively ſenſe of the importance of the buſineſs in which they are engaged, free from the care of examining every ſentence before they offer it as their petition; ſecure that no indecent or unchriſtian expreſſion can mix with their devotions, being

being already ſatisfied of the propriety of the whole form. They ſay that the mind of man is not able to attend to many things at once, and that in our way of worſhip, if the people offer a reaſonable ſervice, they muſt examine every ſentence, hear every word, and underſtand every word they hear; that they muſt remember what went before, if they would conceive the connexion, that they muſt unravel what is expreſſed in a perplexed manner, if they would pray with judgment; and in fine, that they muſt give their Amen to their prayers, with a more ſuperficial examination of them, and a much leſs perfect knowledge of their contents, than they would venture to ſet their ſubſcription to an addreſs to their ſuperiors upon earth.

We anſwer, that the novelty and variety of the expreſſion in our extemporary method, help to fix the mind and keep up the attention. They aſk us, upon what is the mind fixed, upon the object and matter of our prayers, or upon the novelty and variety of expreſſion? If we ſay upon the object and matter of our prayers, they will tell us, that there are in theſe, neither novelty nor variety to aſſiſt us; becauſe our prayers are always addreſſed to that Being who is *the ſame to-day, yeſterday, and for ever*; and the matter of our prayers in public muſt always be nearly the ſame: but if our minds be fixed upon the variety of the expreſſion, or novelty of the phraſe, they ſay (and I fear they ſpeak truth) that this is not prayer, but mere amuſement; ſuch as the mind receives from muſic, a ſong, or an entertaining piece of hiſtory; that it might perhaps prepare the mind for prayer, but is not prayer any more than a ſermon is prayer.

It is evident that many of our miniſters are ſenſible, that their people attend only to the outward circumſtances of their prayers, and that the

way to be popular is to tickle their ears with ſtrange ſounds, or pleaſe their eyes with antic geſtures; elſe why do many of them affect ſuch an unmanly whining cant? Why uſe ſuch diſmal heavy tones, and draw out their words to ſuch an immoderate length? Or why do they affect ſuch diſtortions in their faces? All the world will acknowledge, that theſe are neither neceſſary nor uſeful parts of prayer, unleſs to pleaſe the ſilly vulgar, who regard little more than the ſound and circumſtances of our prayers.

But whatever weight may be in the ſpeculative arguments upon either ſide, experience and matter of fact are fairly againſt us; for they who ſay that forms of prayer enliven devotion, ſeem, by a certain decency obſervable amongſt them in time of ſervice, to confirm what they ſay; while the viſible inattention and indifference of our congregations, flatly contradict our arguments, and prove to the very ſenſes, that our extemporary prayers do not enliven our devotions. In aſſemblies where forms are uſed, there is at leaſt the appearance of devotion, and an air of ſeriouſneſs. None of them are ſeen ſleeping in time of ſervice, few of them gazing about them, not one of them ever preſumes (unleſs in a caſe of abſolute neceſſity) to remove till the whole ſervice be ended; and they frequently meet in public for the buſineſs of prayer, which * Mr. Fordyce juſtly complains we never do, and ſeems to think that it would be very difficult to perſuade our people to it. Thus the practice of thoſe who uſe forms of prayer, proves to me more effectually than all the ſpeculative arguments that can be offered, that they have an higher opinion of the great duty of public prayer, feel a greater pleaſure from it, or are ſome way or

* Edification by public Inſtitutions.

other

other more affected by it, than our people are. Whereas in our aſſemblies there is not ſo much as the air of devotion, not even the outward appearance of ſerioufneſs and attention? many are ſleeping, more gazing about them, and all of *them* † *betray a viſible impatience till prayer is over, that they may be entertained with ſomething more to their liking.* When ſermon is over do we not ſee them remove in crowds, tho' one half of our ſervice, and that the moſt ſolemn half, ſtill remains? Perhaps it may be thought, that this is not a fair account of the matter, and that I miſrepreſent things. Will you believe your own brethren? they ſhall vouch what I have ſaid; let us firſt hear Mr. Bennet's report of the devotion of our brethren in England §; "That careleſs air (ſays he) which ſits upon the face of a congregation, when engaged in prayer, ſhews how little they know of the matter, and how few ſeriouſly join in public and ſolemn prayer; ſome gaze about them, others fall aſleep——others fix their eye it may be on the miniſter, and are affected with what he ſays; but then they only hear him pray, and are moved with the prayer, juſt as they hear ſermons and are moved thereby (a moſt lively picture of our public worſhip!)—— I muſt profeſs to you, ſhould the enemies of our way of worſhip be preſent to obſerve us, there is nothing I ſhould be ſo much aſhamed of, as our exceeding careleſs, irreverent, indevout manner of joining in public prayer." So far Mr. Bennet bears witneſs to the want of devotion in congregations in England, where extemporary prayers are uſed. Let us now ſee if this way of worſhip, has any better ſucceſs or happy effects amongſt us here in Scotland. Alas it is

† Edification by public Inſtitutions.
§ Sermon upon joining in public prayer, p. 112.

every

every where the ſame unnatural, unreaſonable, lifeleſs thing. Let Mr. Fordyce ſpeak for the Scotch congregations: "I doubt not my brethren (ſpeaking to the clergy) but you have frequently obſerved when the miniſter of God has been addreſſing him in the name, and as the mouth of the people, the greateſt part of them ſeem to be doing any thing, rather than joining in ſolemn ſervice; in reality there is no exerciſe of a ſpiritual nature which the generality ſeem to regard ſo little, or to attend ſo liſtleſsly; ſeem did I ſay, the expreſſion is much too feeble; their inſenſibility, their irreverence in this reſpect are, from the whole of their deportment, moſt ſhamefully diſtinguiſhable and flagrant." * If this be true, as indeed it is the very *truth*, I may be allowed to add, that it is moſt ſhamefully impudent in us to alledge that forms of prayer deaden the devotion of the people, and that our extemporary method enlivens it. The little reſpect, nay viſible contempt, that our peope ſhew of public prayers, prove more clearly than all ſpeculative arguments that can be offered, that our preſent way of worſhip is very ill calculated for enlivening the devotion of the people: I have proved by two unexceptional witneſſes, and had it been conſiſtent with the brevity I propoſed, could have produced many more, to prove, that our devotion is not only dead, but wants even all appearance of life. In truth it needs no proof, for every Sunday will ſhew that we want attention, and reverence, to this moſt important duty; and every impartial heart will tell its owner (if he underſtands the nature of prayer), that it is very difficult to join in our public worſhip as it is at preſent performed; that it is impoſſible to do it rationally; that it cannot

* Edification by public Inſtitutions.

be

be attempted without great danger; and that in fact he does it very ſeldom, and even then in a very faint and lifeleſs manner.

ALLOW me next to conſider the third objection offered againſt forms of prayer. I mean that the wants of a congregation cannot be ſo fully expreſſed in that way, as by the extemporary method. This objection ſuppoſes, that a number of the moſt learned and pious men of the age (for ſuch I imagine would be employed) deliberately compoſing a form of prayer, calmly recollecting the matter of it, frequently reviewing the whole, furniſhed with all the antient and modern liturgies, directed by all that has been written on the ſubject, and aſſiſted by every one that wiſhes well to religion and virtue, are more likely to omit ſome neceſſary petition, than a ſingle perſon perhaps of very indifferent talents, and a very moderate education, truſting entirely to an extemporary invention, and to his own memory. The man who can ſuppoſe this, hardly deſerves to be reaſoned with; for it is evident, that, in the firſt caſe, our prayers will be brought as near perfection as poſſible; that in the ſecond, many things muſt be omitted, many injudiciouſly expreſſed, many needleſsly repeated, and the whole tinctured with weakneſs, paſſions, and party principles of the ſpeaker, and that his beſt performances will be as much inferior to a general form of prayer, as he himſelf is in diſcretion, learning, and judgment, to the greateſt men that have wrote upon the ſubject, and to a number of men of the beſt hearts, and calmeſt, ableſt heads, conveened to compoſe the form. The wants, and conſequently the matter of the petitions of a chriſtian congregation, muſt in the main be always the ſame; they will at all times have ſins to confeſs, ſtill have need to aſk pardon, and to implore the divine grace to direct their thoughts, words, and actions; it will ever be their

duty

duty, to pray for all ranks of men, &c. If any general calamity ſhould happen, ſuch as war, famine, or peſtilence, proper forms may be provided; in private caſes, perhaps it might be more for the honour of our religion, and decency of our worſhip that we did not deſcend to the particular circumſtances, ſo much as we do. It is needleſs to deſcribe the diſeaſe to an omniſcient God; moſt caſes of this nature, might be comprehended under the general names of ſickneſs and diſtreſs; but if it be thought proper to deal with God Almighty as we do with an ordinary doctor, and to lay the caſe before him at full length, methods may be found to indulge the humour of the clergy, in this reſpect, without leaving our whole worſhip to their diſcretion, and putting all our public petitions in their power.

Should the ſpiritual condition of a congregation be altered (if it poſſibly can alter ſo much, that the eſtabliſhed form could not comprehend the caſe, which in my humble opinion cannot happen, if the form be well compoſed) let the preſbytery, ſynod, or commiſſion of the aſſembly be applied to, and the caſe being calmly conſidered, its nature and tendency deliberately examined, and its truth and certainty aſcertained; let a form of prayer be compoſed ſuitable to the caſe: but this is too delicate, too dangerous, and difficult an affair, to be truſted to the diſcretion or capacity of any one clergyman; for weakneſs, or villainy, in this reſpect, has more than once diſhonoured our public prayers, with the groſſeſt enthuſiaſm, perverted them to ſerve very bad purpoſes, and expoſed the moſt ſolemn part of our ſervice, as well as religion itſelf, to the ridicule of infidels.

In a word, the ordinary wants of a chriſtian congregation may, nay muſt be more fully expreſſed by a form

a form of prayer, than by extempore effuſions: and extraordinary caſes, after they are diſcovered and examined, may eaſily be provided for, and it is not only poſſible, but very eaſy, to provide for all caſes that ought to be particularly mentioned in our public prayers, in the firſt compoſition of them. But to prevent all wrangling upon this ſubject, and (if poſſible) to content the moſt ſelf-ſufficient clergyman, let there be a proper place in this propoſed form of prayer, where the miniſter may have liberty to pray for all extraordinary caſes, in what words he thinks proper. It is better, that a ſmall part of our worſhip be expoſed to the indiſcretion, ignorance, and paſſions of the parſon, than that the whole ſhould be liable, as it is at preſent, to be made the property of faction, to be tinctured with the prejudices and whimſical opinions of every private miniſter, and offered upon the pernicious principles of the deiſt, or the extravagant notions of the enthuſiaſt.

I SHALL not dwell long upon the laſt objection, I mean that forms of prayer are unlawful, becauſe I believe it never will be offered by men of ſenſe or learning; and it is loſing time and pains to reaſon with ſuch as are deſtitute of both. I ſhall only beg leave to obſerve, that they who ſay that forms of prayer are unlawful, in fact ſay, that God Almighty commanded, that our Saviour attended, uſed, and taught his diſciples an unlawful way of worſhip; for that he did ſo, I have proved already, and our own directory for public worſhip acknowleges that "Our Lord's prayer is not only a pattern for prayer; but itſelf a moſt comprehenſive prayer." Here I cannot help obſerving with regret, that wherever our directory directs well, there our clergy have deſpiſed our directory; for inſtance, it recommends that the Lord's prayer be uſed in our public worſhip; that ordinarily a chapter out of each Teſtament be read at every meeting: the firſt is neglected

by

by moſt, and the laſt by all of them. It directs that our worſhip begin with prayer, but now it begins with praiſe; that the miniſter before worſhip ſhall ſolemnly exhort the people to the worſhiping of the great name of God; but at preſent we ruſh into a very ſolemn part of worſhip, without a word of previous exhortation, and I fear very often without a ſerious thought. It is eaſy to find out the reaſon why the Lord's prayer and the reading of the ſcriptures have been joſtled out of our ſervice; they have been forced out to make room for Maſs John's *more maſterly performances*; but why the other alterations have been made, the clergy, who directs all things, can only tell. To them I leave it, and reſume my ſubject. If forms are unlawful, we are unlawfully baptized, for that is done by a form; and all the extemporary prayers which we uſe upon that occaſion are not eſſential to the ſacrament, and are additions of men. We adminiſter the Lord's ſupper in an unlawful manner, for we do it by a form, I mean the words of the firſt inſtitution: we are diſmiſſed every Lord's day with an unlawful bleſſing; for one of the ſolemn forms with which the apoſtles conclude their epiſtles, is always uſed upon that occaſion: ſo that nothing can be more inconſiſtent with ingenuity and common ſenſe, than for us to cry out againſt forms, when the moſt ſolemn and important parts of our religion and woſhip are performed in that way, and when we neither baptize, nor communicate, nor bleſs our congregations in a lawful way, unleſs forms be lawful; nor do theſe things in the beſt manner, unleſs doing them by a form be the beſt.

But further, If forms of prayer be not acceptable to God, and an uſeful way of worſhip for ourſelves, we groſly offend every time that we meet in church: for it is impoſſible to ſing eighteen or twenty lines of a pſalm, but we offer ſome important

important petition by a form; and ſome pſalms might be pointed out that are almoſt continued prayers; ſo that unleſs we will affirm, that our prayers are acceptable to God, and uſeful to ourſelves when they are ſung, but otherwiſe when they are ſaid by a form, we muſt allow that we are inconſiſtent with ourſelves when we cry out againſt forms; and that our miniſters impoſe upon us, when they ſpirit us up againſt that way of worſhip, that they may have the better opportunity to gratify their own vanity, to manufacture our prayers after their own manner, and to mix them up with their own private opinions.

If extemporary worſhip be preferable, what good reaſon can be given why the miniſters do not ſing pſalms extempore in our names, as well as offer extemporary prayers? for we are as much concerned to join in the laſt as in the firſt; a blunder in the one is as dangerous as in the other, and we could as well go along with him in our hearts, when he ſung an extemporary pſalm, as we can do when he ſays an extemporary prayer. This inconſiſtency in our worſhip has not entirely eſcaped the obſervation of our bethren, for many of them have warmly inſiſted upon it, that the Spirit of *God is reſtrained by uſing the pſalms of David* *, and therefore propoſed, that we ſhould ſing as well as pray extempore: and upon the ſuppoſition, that public worſhip in the extemporary way is moſt rational, they were certainly in the right; for no good reaſons can be given for praiſing God by forms, that will not be equally good for praying to him in the ſame way; and no objection can be offered againſt the laſt, that will not be as ſtrong againſt the firſt; for inſtance, if we ſay that praying to God by forms deadens the devotion of the people, ſo will praiſing him by

* Heylin's hiſtory of the preſbyterians.

forms

forms too. If forms of prayer reſtrain the influences of the Holy Spirit, ſo muſt forms of praiſe. If forms of prayer cannot expreſs all the wants of a chriſtian congregation, neither will forms of praiſe comprehend all the cauſes for which a chriſtian congregation may have reaſon to praiſe God; eſpecially, as the forms we uſe were compoſed ſeveral thouſand years ago, and calculated chiefly for the Jewiſh religion and worſhip. If forms of prayer be unlawful in themſelves, ſo muſt our forms of praiſe, becauſe, as I have obſerved before, they are often real prayers.

SUPPOSING that extemporary worſhip was more acceptable to God, and uſeful to ourſelves, no man in a congregation can reap the benefit of it but the parſon. Our laity are moſt groſly miſtaken, if they imagine that they pray extempore by our preſent method; for if they pray in the words of the miniſter (and in his words they muſt pray if they join at all in public worſhip), they are as much confined to a form as any other people. For example, if the miniſter ſays, *moſt gracious God forgive us our ſins, preſerve us from danger, and provide for our neceſſities*; if the people repeat theſe words, either in their minds, or with their mouths, or both, it is evident that they pray as much by a form, as if the prayer had been compoſed a thouſand years ago; in fact it is impoſſible for a congregation to join in worſhip otherways than by a form; and all the difference is, that we worſhip by a form with which we are entirely unacquainted; a form that we have never ſeen nor examined before; a form that is truſted to the diſcretion and ability of the parſon for the time, and which the miniſter himſelf has never once read over, nor examined, even in the ſlighteſt manner. It is hard to determine whether his preſumption in putting a

form

form of a prayer into our mouths, that he has never examined, or our complaiſance in uſing a form that neither we nor our miniſter have ever once read over, is moſt unaccountable. But that either we or he ſhould imagine, that to worſhip God in this manner is moſt rational for us, or moſt acceptable to him, is ſuch an inſtance of the ſtrength of prejudice, and the effects of education, as no man could have thought poſſible, had it not been proved by experience. For in fact, it is to imagine that our worſhip is the more rational, the more we are ſtrangers to the words and matter of our prayers, and the whole acceſs we have had to ſatisfy ourſelves of the property of our petitions, and the more confidence we repoſe in another man.

THAT our worſhip will be the more acceptable to the Deity, the leſs care and pains that is taken about the words or matter of it by the parſon, or the people, and that our prayers will be ſo much the ſooner heard, the leſs chance they have to be expreſſed in proper words, or to conſiſt of pious and reaſonable petitions. We may ſometimes have a better, or worſe form, according to the judgment and capacity of the miniſter, but we muſt always have a very defective one, and our very beſt form muſt be as far inferior to a national well-compoſed liturgy, as the learning, judgment, and memory of the one man, is to the abilities and calm reflection of a number of the moſt learned and judicious men of the age. I muſt confeſs that I have often beheld with indignation the parſon pulling out his papers for the ſermon, when he truſted the prayer to his invention and memory; not that I have any prejudice againſt reading of ſermons, or am not convinced that it is the beſt method, unleſs the miniſter be a man of extraordinary parts, of extenſive learning, and bleſſed with a very good

memory; but that I look upon it as an affront offered to God and the congregation, and very abſurd in this inſtance, as it ſhews that the miniſter is leſs concerned about the propriety and decency of his addreſs to his God, than to his people; and that he is more afraid of a blunder in his ſermon, than in his worſhip; or at leaſt, that he thinks, either that a miſtake in the laſt is of leſs conſequence than in the firſt, or that it is an eaſier matter to pray than to preach well. I own that he has reaſon to believe that any thing like a prayer will paſs with the bulk of the people, becauſe in truth they do not regard it much; but this ſhould never induce him to ſhew that he is as careleſs about the matter and words of their prayers as they are themſelves, and that he takes more care and pains to pleaſe them by his ſermons, than to offer their prayers in a conciſe and proper manner.

I have often heard the members of our church, when the difficulties and dangers of our preſent way of worſhip have been fairly laid before them, ſatisfy themſelves by ſaying, that moſt of our miniſters had a form of prayer which they uſed, and with which, by length of time, their people became very well acquainted. I believe it may be true, that moſt of them naturally fall into a form; but, if we will believe themſelves (and they certainly know the beſt) it is rather by chance than by deſign, and of conſequence more by good luck, than good management, or much care, if the form they fall into be a good one. However, it is here granted, that the worſhiping God by a form, is not only lawful and reaſonable, but alſo neceſſary; and if this be caſe, why ſhould not our worſhip be rendered uniform by an eſtabliſhed general form of prayer? why ſhould it not be brought as near perfection as poſſible, by the judgment, piety, and learning

learning of our ableſt miniſters, and other members of our church, conferring together upon the ſubject? why ſhould not this form of prayer be communicated to the laity, that we may examine and approve of it? is the parſon's form ſuch a ſecret that we may not ſee and examine it for ourſelves? is it an advantage to our worſhip that he may alter, curtail, or enlarge it, as his paſſions or prejudices chance to direct, and warp into his form any whimſical opinions that he chances to embrace? we muſt, notwithſtanding of his form, go to the church with a trembling heart, as we know not but ſome miniſter may officiate whoſe form of prayer we never have heard, our own miniſter may have changed his, or ſome unlucky and indecent petition may be thrown in, as he has it in his power to do as he pleaſes.

At the ſame time it is true, that our miniſters, who carefully compoſe and conſtantly uſe a form of prayer, do as much as they can, in their preſent circumſtances, to render our worſhip pure and rational, and to aſſiſt the devotions of their people; and therefore deſerve their eſteem and thanks; but yet it is evident, that theſe private forms have no great chance of being ſo full and perfect, and that they have but few of the advantages of a general eſtabliſhed form of prayer, and many of the diſadvantages of the extemporary method.

It has been often urged in defence of extempore public prayers, that the apoſtles uſed that way of worſhip. If they did ſo, they did more than their maſter either taught them, or gave them an example of, as far as we can judge. But ſuppoſing that it were proved (which it has not yet been, and I doubt never will be) that the apoſtles uſed extemporary public prayer, I am afraid, we ſhall not be able to infer from thence, that our miniſters

ſhould pray extempore, or that the people ſhould truſt every one of them with the compoſition, and direction of their public worſhip; unleſs it could be alſo proved, that every one of them is directed by immediate inſpiration. I have often bluſhed for our miniſters, when I have heard them urge this argument, as it is ſo weak and inconcluſive in itſelf, and betrays ſo much preſumption and ſelf-ſufficiency in them; for in fact it is putting our preſent miniſters upon a level with the apoſtles. Some days ago I was paſſing by Bedlam, and obſerved one of its wretched inhabitants wreſtling with a great iron gate; I aſked him what he was about? he told me, with an air of importance, that his name was Sampſon, and that he meant to carry up that gate to the top of an oppoſite hill, as his name-ſake did the gate of Gaza. I did not ſtay to convince him that Sampſon was endued with miraculous ſtrength, but I could not help thinking that there was a great reſemblance in his way of reaſoning, or rather running mad, to the argument in hand; for the apoſtles were endued with miraculous gifts as much ſuperior to the abilities of our preſent miniſters, as Sampſon's ſtrength was to that of the poor bedlamite: they lived in an age in which miraculous gifts by the goodneſs of God were common in the church; but in our time there is nothing miraculous unleſs it be the ſelf-ſufficiency and preſumption of the clergy, in taking upon them to offer an extemporary addreſs to their Maker; and each of them claiming a right to make a whole pariſh pray as he pleaſes; and the abſurd confidence repoſed in them by the laity; and the tame ſubmiſſion by which they ſuffer every man that chances to fill their pulpits, to manufacture and mix up their prayers as he chuſes. Theſe indeed are miraculous things, ſuch as no age, no country,

country, no religion, ever produced examples of; and it is ſtill more ſurprizing that the clergy themſelves (as I have proved before) ſee, and publiſh to the world, that the people do not join in public worſhip; and the moſt learned and ſenſible part of the laity feel and acknowledge that it is very difficult and dangerous for them to join in it, as it is performed at preſent; and yet that none of our clergy have compaſſion and humility to propoſe, nor any of the laity reſolution to demand change, but that all of them ſit down with an abſurd and dangerous way of worſhip, introduced partly by neceſſity, and partly by enthuſiaſm, in the diſtracted days of our reformation; diſapproved of by our ableſt reformers from the beginning, as witneſs John Knox, who compoſed and uſed a form of prayer; and only approved of and ſupported by the ſilly ignorant vulgar, who have ſo little knowledge, either of the nature, or importance of prayer, that they would not give themſelves the trouble to go to church, unleſs it were to hear a ſermon; and by the turbulent and ſelf-ſufficient part of the clergy, who find that it gives them a fair opportunity to ſow diſcord, propagate faction, and proſtitute our worſhip to their fooliſh fondneſs for popularity. That the mob who place great merit in hearing many ſermons, and think preaching the moſt important part of public worſhip, ſhould be fond of our preſent method, is no wonder at all, for our extemporary effuſions are rather ſermons than prayers. It is natural too for the ambitious, enthuſiaſtical, and libertine part of our clergy to be warmly attached to our preſent way of worſhip; it moſt effectually anſwers their ſeveral purpoſes; it affords the ambitious a large field for diſplaying their popular talents, and an excellent opportunity to *preach themſelves*; it gives enthuſiaſts and libertines

libertines fair ſcope to vent their whimſical and pernicious principles: indeed nothing can be better calculated for propagating ſedition, hereſy, enthuſiaſm and party principles, than our preſent way of worſhip, ſince every miniſter has the compoſition of moſt of it, and the choice and management of the whole; ſo that it is no wonder if men of theſe characters be fond of it, nay it would be very ſurprizing if they could be perſuaded to give up our preſent method.

But it is not eaſy to conceive why the learned, orthodox, and pious part of our clergy, who have no other views but the good of ſouls, and the glory of God, have not endeavoured to remedy theſe ills, by compoſing and authorizing ſuch a form of prayer as might enable every congregation in the kingdom to offer their prayers upon truly chriſtian principles: or how it comes to paſs that the ſenſible and pious part of our laity (though they can hardly miſs to ſee, that it is inconſiſtent with religion, and common ſenſe, to truſt the moſt ſolemn part of our worſhip to the diſcretion, honeſty, and ability often of ſtrangers whom they have never ſeen before, and always of individuals, of whoſe weakneſs and folly they have many inſtances) chuſe to run ſuch a terrible riſk.

I have contributed my poor mite to deliver the laity from the hardſhips and danger to which they are expoſed by our preſent way of worſhip; and as (I think) I have made it obvious, that the preſent method is attended with great inconveniencies and eminent danger to us poor lay men: I may likewiſe hope that the rulers of our church will lay our caſe to heart, and take ſuch methods as may enable us to offer a rational ſervice to the great ſource of reaſon, and to lift up holy hands without perplexity, fear, or danger. While our caſe

continued as it is, our churches may indeed be wded by thoſe who have not ſenſe to ſee their anger, nor attention to perceive upon how many oppoſite principles they are made to pray; perſons who have never perhaps in all their lives reflected upon the nature and importance of prayer, and come to church partly becauſe it is the cuſtom, or at moſt to hear a ſermon; but they who conſider the nature and importance of public worſhip will hardly chuſe, in a thing of ſo great conſequence, to be blindfolded and led by the parſon.

WITH all humility and due deference I ſubmit the whole to your conſideration, more extenſive learning, and better judgment, and to the candid reflection of all pious chriſtians, and am, with the greateſt reſpect,

Reverend Father,

your moſt obedient,

and moſt humble ſervant,

Inverary,
May 8th, 1758.

A. T. Blackſmith.

FINIS.

30
73
JUN